

SPECIAL REPORT / **NFL BRAIN RESEARCH:**
\$30 Million Later, What Do We Know? **By Tom Taylor** 74

December 14, 2015

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The Man

After his five TDs in the ACC title game, **Watson is front and center** in the Heisman and national-title races.

**COLLEGE
FOOTBALL
PLAYOFF
PREVIEW**

Deshaun Watson

*Makes Clemson
The Team To Beat* 36

+ By PETE THAMEL

PLUS

**THE SI
HEISMAN
POLL**

*You might be
surprised*



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The North Face logo, featuring the brand name in white capital letters above a white quarter-circle icon, all set against a red rectangular background.

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NORTH
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A man in a red quilted Thermoball jacket and a black helmet with 'THE NORTH FACE' and a green camouflage pattern is shown from the side. He is holding two ice axes in the air against a clear blue sky. A snowy mountain peak is visible in the background.

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By Tom Taylor

+

OH, HENRY

Bama's Heisman candidate blasted for 189 yards in an SEC title game win over Florida.

Photograph by
Kevin C. Cox
Getty Images

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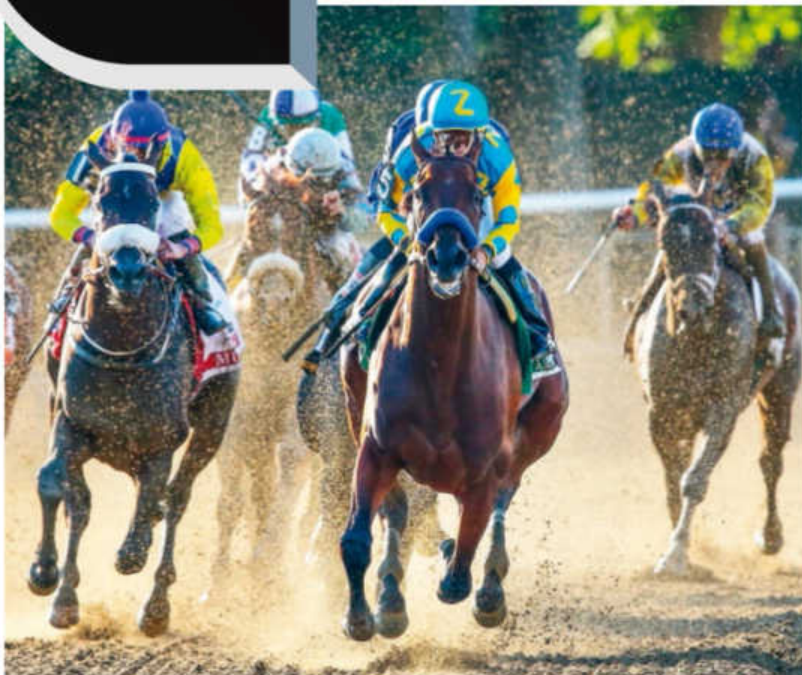
ON THE COVER

Streeter Lecka/Getty Images

Sports Illustrated

SI.COM

FOR DEC. 14, 2015



Sports fans across the nation went wild with tweets about **American Pharoah's** Triple Crown win at Belmont. Which of your favorite sports figures dominated social media this year? Beginning Dec. 9, go to **SI.com/social-100-2015** to see our rankings of the best social media feeds and mentions of 2015.

SI.COM'S TOP STORIES

1 The Hobo King

For a roundup of last week's most popular stories on SI.com—including a feature on the greatest Super Bowl story never to run in **SPORTS ILLUSTRATED**—go to **SI.com/topstories**



2 Underdogs

Residents at the Abraxas I treatment center earn the right to play football

3 Don Garber Q&A

The MLS commissioner discusses the state of U.S. soccer

4 From Project to Pillar

Pistons center Andre Drummond is dominating in the middle for Detroit

5 Undefeated

Panthers safety Roman Harper explains why Carolina remains unbeaten



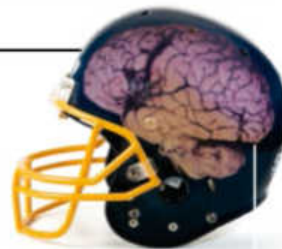
What Inspires You?

Share a photo with **SPORTS ILLUSTRATED** of the

people, places or things in the world of sports that lift you up, and you'll have a chance to be featured in **SI.com's** Inspirations photo gallery on Dec. 15. Go to **SI.com/inspirationsUGC** for more information on how to submit your photos using Twitter and Instagram.

SB 100

What progress will the NFL have made in preventing and treating brain injuries by Super Bowl 100 in 2066? **SPORTS ILLUSTRATED** and **Wired** have teamed up to forecast the many changes in store for the NFL over the next five decades in the Super Bowl 100 series, presented by Gatorade. Go to **SI.com/sb100** or **Wired.com/sb100** to read about the future, including potential advances in concussion science.





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+

1
of
3

Leading Off

Rodgers And Out

■ On Dec. 3 in Detroit, the Packers appeared to be heading for their fifth loss in six games, trailing 23-21 with no time remaining and the ball on their own 39. But thanks to a Lions penalty on what should have been the final play, quarterback Aaron Rodgers (below) launched a prayer. Tight end Richard Rodgers came down with the ball in the end zone, and Green Bay had a 27-23 victory, an 8-4 record and hopes for the playoffs.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
LEON HALIP
GETTY IMAGES

INSET:
PAUL SANCYA
AP





**Leading
Off**

+

2
of
3

82-0?

■ Stop the Presses! Warriors Win! Stephen Curry (30) got the upper hand on the Nets' Thomas Robinson on Sunday in Brooklyn, and though he only scored 28 on the evening—4.4 below his league-leading average—Curry and Golden State still came away with a 114-98 victory to bring their record to 22-0. The Warriors broke the mark for consecutive wins to start a season (15) weeks ago, and now talk has turned to just how many games they can win. The 1995-96 Bulls hold the mark with a 72-10 record.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
**NATHANIEL S.
BUTLER**

NBAE/GETTY IMAGES









+

33

**Leading
Off**

Timber Time

■ Though neither Portland's Rodney Wallace (22) nor Harrison Afful of Columbus seems to be making any headway, the Timber did take the upper hand in the game, winning 2-1 on Sunday to claim their first MLS Championship. Portland celebrated (below) at MAPFRE Stadium in Columbus, as Diego Valeri was named MVP.

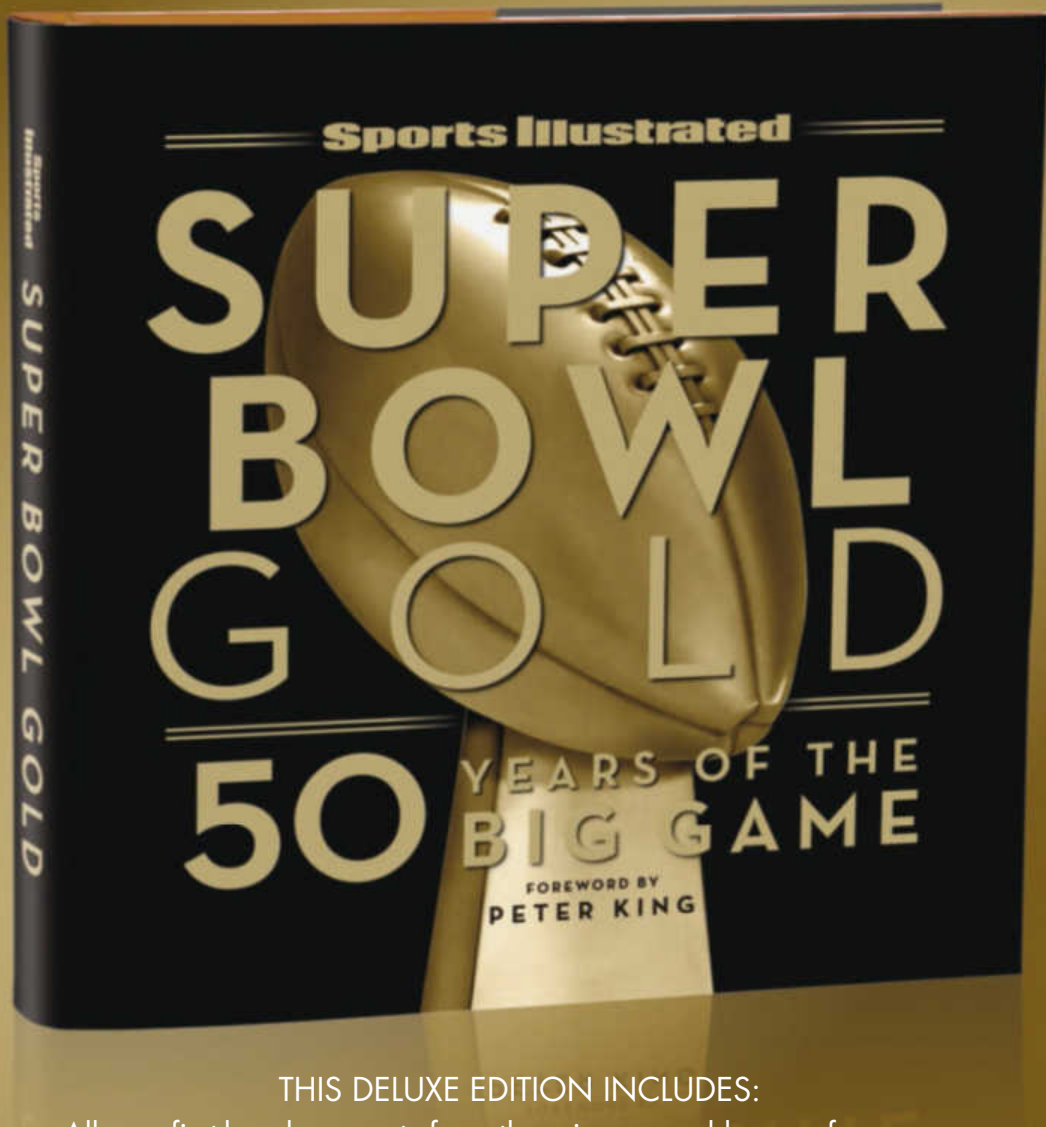
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ANDY MEAD
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COVER

Kudos to Austin Murphy for his extraordinarily well-written and insightful piece about Panthers quarterback **Cam Newton** (*Why So Serious?*). It has been a long time since a sportswriter has made me simultaneously think and laugh out loud.

Ashley Oliphant
Denver, N.C.



So which version of Newton are you selling? The one who's driving the NFC-leading 12-0 Panthers, or the one who got into a fight with his teammate, cornerback Josh Norman, over an interception in training camp (*above*)? Newton carries a lot of baggage that MVP statistics aren't going to wipe out.

Tom Deitz
San Diego



While Secretary of Education Arne Duncan fixes the entire blame for graduation rates on the universities (SCORECARD), I wonder what's happened to personal responsibility. Are these young men and women doing everything they can to ensure their own success? We laud these students for their athletic accomplishments, but we do not hold them accountable for any academic shortcomings.

Kevin Druckenmiller, Fremont, Ohio

Secretary Duncan gets it. The exploitation of young athletes, many of them African-Americans, by institutions of higher education is morally unacceptable. They are students first: If a school is going to reap the financial rewards from what they do on the field, it needs to educate them.

James O'Reilly, Portsmouth, R.I.

» I found the past and present psychological bullying of **Jalen Brunson** at the hands of his father, Rick, reprehensible. And now Jalen feels that he deserves his dad's abuse. Bob Hurley's advice—finding the balance as parent and as coach—seems to have been worthless.

Ron Luchini
Bay Village, Ohio



Thank you for the article on Holly Holm (*Ain't That a Kick in the Head?*). Interestingly enough, Ronda Rousey had a sense of how the fight would end when she told Jimmy Fallon in October that "she'll try to kick me in the head, but it's not going to go like that." In fact, it did.

Troy Harvey, Grand Rapids.

CONTACT
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SCOUTCARD

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Given the history of huge pitcher contracts, MLB's recent deals seem nuts—until you understand the money flooding into the game

BY TOM VERDUCCI



ALONG WITH THE yacht, the imported 12-cylinder automobile, the designer handbag and the unpronounceable bottle of wine with a layer of dust, add the free-agent starting pitcher to the roster of Veblen goods. Back in 1899, economist Thorstein Veblen gave eponymous notice to how Americans love their conspicuous consumptions, the luxury goods that are attractive because they are expensive—though 76 years before free agency, he didn't have in mind Boston Beaneaters pitcher Vic Willis and his league-high \$1,800 salary that year.

Now the pitcher as Veblen good has become a common occurrence. In a six-day shopping spree last week that made Rodeo Drive look like a church rummage sale, major league teams shelled out \$623 million to just four pitchers: David Price (\$217 million, seven years by Boston), Zack Greinke (\$206 million, six years by Arizona), Jordan Zimmermann (\$110 million, five years by Detroit) and Jeff Samardzija (\$90 million, five years by

San Francisco). Eighteen of the 23 seasons those teams bought will pay the pitchers an average of \$29 million when they are 32 and older—huge bucks for the clearly established decline years in today's game.

"There are exceptions to any rule," Red Sox owner John Henry said on the long-term outlook on Price, who could be 37 when Henry stops paying him. (Price can exercise an opt-out clause after three years.) It's a common tune. Each year teams plunk down more and more millions in the hope that their guy is the exception. Most will be wrong.

Thirteen pitchers previously signed

walk into the arms of the Cubs (at \$155 million for ages 31 to 36). The Sox cobbled together a rotation without an ace and used players 30 and younger to start all but six of their 2015 games. Their prudence earned them the third-worst rotation in the AL and a last-place finish.

Quicker than you could say "Gucci," Boston reversed course. Price makes perfect sense, at least in the short term. He loves pitching in Fenway Park (6–1, 1.95 ERA in 11 starts), is battle-proven on the road in the AL East (25–3 as a visitor in Boston, New York, Toronto and Baltimore), has maintained his velocity while using his

In six days MLB teams shelled out \$623 million to just four pitchers.

contracts worth more than \$120 million. So far five of them have pitched under those contracts at age 32 or older, and all five have been busts. Justin Verlander, Johan Santana, Barry Zito, CC Sabathia and Mike Hampton, in 14 combined seasons at age 32 or higher, are 74–88 with a 4.56 ERA.

Most pitchers these days, regardless of salary, fall off a cliff around age 32. Last year only two of the top 34 qualified ERAs (John Lackey and A.J. Burnett) belonged to pitchers 32 or older. Greatness leaves even the best pitchers in a hurry.

Knowing the obvious economic foolishness of signing aging pitchers, the Red Sox after the 2014 season let ace Jon Lester

changeup more and has especially clean mechanics that have kept him free of any major arm injuries.

No sooner had Boston made Price the highest-paid pitcher in history than Arizona, finding its own exception, gave Greinke the highest average annual value of any player in history. Greinke had a 1.66 ERA last season, the fourth-lowest since the mound was lowered in 1969. He, too, will be 37 at the end of his record contract.

It's easy to mock the salaries being thrown at free-agent pitchers. Zimmermann, who turns 30 in May, is coming off his worst season while showing a decline in velocity. Samardzija, who

pitches next year at 31, hit the jackpot despite giving up the most earned runs, hits and home runs in the AL last year.

So why do teams keep laying out so much for what they know the actuarial tables define as decline years? They like to spend the money as fast as it is coming in. The Diamondbacks, for instance, enriched Greinke nine months after they signed a 20-year local television deal worth over \$1.5 billion, more than doubling their previous annual take. Even adjusted for inflation, revenues in baseball have grown 24% in five years, 56% in 10 years and 102% in 15 years.

Digital delivery in an increasingly sports-obsessed culture has been very good to baseball. Live content, the workaround to the DVR, is king, and baseball has 2,430 games and a postseason to sell every year to sponsors who actually want their ads seen. That's why we have to stop looking at mega-contracts in terms of rational year-by-year "value" and start looking at them as clubs do: luxury goods they can afford.

So what may have seemed an absurd, irrational week of spending actually said more about the robust financial health of baseball than it did the quirky market for pitching. After all, when it comes to the rich and their Veblen goods, the prestige is found not in the wisdom of value, but in the joy of ownership. □



GO FIGURE

43

Consecutive Premier League home games against newly promoted teams played by Chelsea without a loss—dating back to 2001—before it fell to Bournemouth 1–0 last Saturday.



1,303

Games played in Predators history before one of their defensemen scored a hat trick. Shea Weber scored three goals in a 5–4 overtime loss to the Red Wings last Saturday.

2

Points for the Saints after Stephane Anthony returned a blocked extra point for a score on Sunday against the Panthers. A new rule made returning such blocks legal this season; New Orleans is the first team to do it.

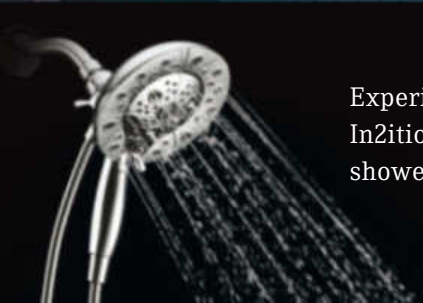




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NHL

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Great One

On Dec. 31, 1981, Wayne Gretzky scored five goals in one game to reach 50 in 39 games. Now, 35 years later, Breitling has made 50 commemorative watches

SI: Did you ever think you could score 50 goals in 39 games?

Wayne Gretzky: No. [Oilers defenseman] Kevin Lowe and I were driving to the game that night. I was a little bit more unruly than normal. He said, "What are you nervous about?" I said, "I can't get this close to 50 in 50 and not produce. I'll look really bad. I didn't want to embarrass myself."

SI: What were your first thoughts when you scored the 50th goal, the fifth of the night?

WG: The first thing I thought: *I have a chance to get 100 goals.* I was always disappointed that I ended with 92.



SI: Your parents weren't at the game, because you told them you didn't think it was going to happen. What was the first thing they said to you afterward?

WG: "What took you so long?" That was exactly what my dad told me.

SI: Have people forgotten about you as a goal scorer?

WG: I called [Sirius XM

analyst] Matthew Barnaby the other day and gave him s--- about that: *You guys don't ever say I'm a goal scorer!* But I don't know. If somebody said, *I watch Wayne Gretzky play, and he plays so hard,* that's all I



Celebrate 50 goals with a \$35,000 watch.

really cared about. I tried to play the best I could every single game. The fact that people don't look at me as a goal scorer—I don't worry about that.

SI: Do you miss coaching?

WG: No. I loved it. I'm glad I did it. Great group of kids. I probably would've been a better coach if I could've coached the Oilers in the '80s.

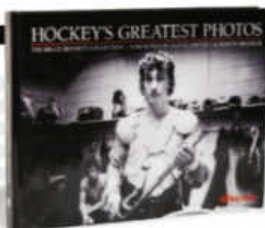
SI: Who are your favorite players to watch?

WG: I think Sidney Crosby is the best player in hockey. I think Alex Ovechkin is an animal. I think Steven Stamkos is special. The best player in the next two years will be Connor McDavid.

—Jeremy Fuchs

Fastest To 50 Goals

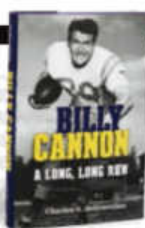
▶ WAYNE GRETZKY	39 GAMES	1981-82
GRETZKY	42 GAMES	1983-84
MARIO LEMIEUX	46 GAMES	1988-89
GRETZKY	49 GAMES	1984-85
BRETT HULL	49 GAMES	1990-91



Hockey's Greatest Photos

Bruce Bennett

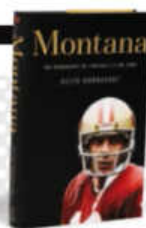
It's 250 pics from 40 years on ice and off, capturing everything from Gretzky at 18 to Messier as Santa to Jagr's mullet. #goodshot



Billy Cannon

Charles N. deGravelles

The LSU legend from his high school days to the NFL to prison and beyond. At times rudimentary but always informative. #say"ahh"



Montana

Keith Dunnivant

Details an era and a lot of inside moments and posits Joe Cool as Joe Competitive. Moves along well but borders on overwritten. #winner



Speed Kings

Andy Bull

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The Best Non-New Year's Bowls

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TCU QB Trevone Boykin has healed; shootout to follow

RUSSELL ATHLETIC BOWL UNC (11-2) **VS.** BAYLOR (9-3)

The nation's top two offenses in yards per play

LAS VEGAS BOWL UTAH (9-3) **VS.** BYU (9-3)

After a two-year in-season hiatus the rivalry is renewed

BOCA RATON BOWL TEMPLE (10-3) **VS.** TOLEDO (9-2)

The premier Group of Five showdown

CITRUS BOWL VIRGINIA TECH (6-6) **VS.** TULSA (6-6)

Where Hokies coach Frank Beamer's 23-bowl streak began



RICHARD DEITSCH'S MEDIA CIRCUS

Night Shift

The College Football Playoff takes on Ryan Seacrest

THE LORDS OF college football are betting you will forsake auld acquaintances this New Year's Eve for a new experience: the College Football Playoff.

This year's national semifinals (the Cotton and Orange bowls) will be played on Thursday, Dec. 31, with the first game set for 4 p.m. EST and the second scheduled to kick off around 8. "I really feel like we're going to change the culture

of New Year's Eve in the country," CFP executive director Bill Hancock told reporters last June.

Maybe, but it's not going to happen overnight. Plenty of Americans will be working during the semifinal games, and many others will need to be persuaded to watch college football on a night usually reserved for social gatherings and watching the ball drop. But New Year's Eve playoff

games aren't going away. This is the second year of ESPN's 12-year, \$7.3 billion deal with the CFP (which includes the three playoff games and up to four major bowl games on New Year's Eve or Day), and eight of the remaining 11 years feature the national semis on Dec. 31.

ESPN tried to reduce that number to seven by moving this season's final four to Jan. 2. "With Saturday being a traditional college football day, we thought it could be a great one-time opportunity to have the semifinals fall on Jan. 2," says Ilan Ben-Hanan, ESPN's vice president, college sports programming. "You would have the Rose and Sugar and Fiesta [bowls] on Jan. 1, as it already is scheduled, and then you would move what is the current New Year's Eve schedule to Jan. 2. The CFP vetted the idea and decided to stick with the regularly scheduled calendar."

The inaugural college football semifinals, which took place last Jan. 1, were a ratings bonanza: Ohio State's victory over Alabama at the Sugar Bowl

drew 28.3 million viewers, while Oregon's win over Florida State at the Rose averaged 28.2 million. Those numbers are unlikely to be duplicated this year. "I think the diehards will change [their habits] immediately because they are going to want to find these games," says Ben-Hanan, who is optimistic casual viewers will come around: "Eventually, when people plan New Year's Eve parties, there will be more of an emphasis on making sure that there is a TV tuned into the game."

That cultural shift is assured at Gallettes, the famed Tuscaloosa watering hole (the bar's trademark cocktail is the Yellowhammer) that sits about a pitching wedge from Bryant-Denny Stadium. Jeff Sirkin, the co-owner, laughed when asked if any of his 32 televisions wouldn't be tuned to the CFP on New Year's Eve. "Strictly business when it comes to what we are watching," Sirkin said. "There'll be football on here all day. That's a guarantee. □

5 Musts for Building An Epic Man Cave

Upgrade your sacred space for kickoff time with these hot-list picks from Amazon.

Bring the end zone home. Step up and show your man cave some love with these instant boosts to the holiest room in the house. The guys will want to watch the game at your place with these options for the latest in TV and streaming technologies, like at-home simulators and immersive big screens. No matter the sport, you'll be ready to kick back at go time in your own castle of content.

Get Competitive

Let your in-it-to-win-it side out with games and indoor sports that fuel the fun. Oh, it's on.



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Carve Out Man Time

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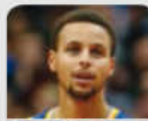
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Athletes . . . They're Just Like Us!

Especially when they tweet their bizarre and mundane thoughts

ON DEC. 9, for the fifth year in a row, SI.com is running its list of the top 100 Twitter follows in sports (**SI.com/social-100-2015**). This edition also includes the top 10 Facebook and Instagram accounts, as well as the 10 best Vines of the year. As athletes become more accessible on social media, they also reveal what they really think about when they're away from the field. Look at these tweets from six athletes who made the 2015 Social 100, and see if you can figure out who sent them.

1. I know the world is failing when it's 2015 and I can't text my dogs.
2. wonder if Superman has to squint when he flies fast
3. Going to immigrations office first thing in the morning to get my citizenship application so I can vote in 2020. #kanye2020 #weareallbro
4. Random thought: Every bad guy in every movie is a terrible shot and a terrible fighter.
5. So, my Wife bought a new toilet for our house. You know, one of those automatic ones. And I'm Hype!!! Yep That's it, Goodnight! #blessed
6. Really want some Roosters right now



A. Stephen Curry
@StephenCurry30



B. Roberto Luongo
@strombone1



C. Kyle Long
@KyleLong



D. Sydney Leroux Dwyer
@sydneyleroux



E. Cardale Jones
@CJ12_



F. Brandon McCarthy
@BMcCarthy32

ANSWER KEY: E / 6 / E / 1 / D / 2 / F / 3 / B / 4 / C / 5 / A / 6



THEY SAID IT

I APPRECIATE YOUR VOTES FOR ALL-STAR GAME, BUT 3 ON 3 WOULD KILL ME, AND I DON'T WANT TO DIE YET :) THANK YOU FOR UNDERSTANDING. TOO OLD :)

Jaromir Jagr

Tweet by the 43-year-old Panthers forward asking not to be elected to the All-Star Game, which will feature wide-open, three-skater-per-team hockey throughout.



SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

The organizers of next summer's Rio Olympics floated a plan **to charge athletes for air conditioning** in their rooms. (They withdrew the proposal after catching heat.)

The Warriors

They're off to a 22-0 start; that's more wins than the 76ers have in the last two seasons.



HOT ▲
NOT ▼



Bowls

Three five-win teams got invites, so regardless of outcome, everyone is a loser.

FASTEST MAN ALIVE
WORLD NUMBER ONE
TRIPLE CROWN
GREATEST SHOOTER

A DEFINING YEAR IN SPORTS

Sports Illustrated

SPORTSMAN

— of the —
YEAR

WHO WILL IT BE?

GRAND SLAM
FASTEST MAN ALIVE
TRIPLE CROWN
WORLD CUP

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CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE WITH

CHASE



Robert Graham



Vitamins For Victory

Rehab as prehab

AT THE CORE of the Atlanta Hawks' philosophy is a simple substance: vitamins. Though those are typically found in pill form, the team doesn't limit its players to the digestible variety.

"Before the basketball vitamin—the individual skills sessions—we have the

body vitamin," says Hawks director of rehabilitation Mike Roncarati. "It doesn't matter if you're injured or not. Each player gets 10 to 20 minutes of rehab treatment to work on things that may have been forgone in training."

During conditioning, Roncarati says, a player concentrates on physiological output, such as lifting more weight, jumping higher or sprinting faster. But a rehab session is more focused on internal movements, such as body position and muscle

activation. These "body vitamins," as Roncarati describes them, help prevent injuries, increase range of motion and combat fatigue.

"Because of how long their torsos are, most basketball players have stiff backs, hips and ankles," says Roncarati, who was the strength-and-conditioning coach for the NBA champion Warriors last season. "We do a lot of exercises kneeling and on hands and knees, and we try to teach [players] how to properly drop and absorb force when landing from a jump, to prevent ankle injuries."

Roncarati says many players stand on the outside of the foot, making the ankle more prone to rolling inward. (Most sprains are actually due to foot inversions, even though it looks as if the ankle is turning outward.) When a player can use the inner part of the foot and integrate the same-side hip and opposite-side core muscles while standing, he is less likely to get a sprain during game action, especially when fatigued.

"We just have to find out where they are most deficient, and when we see a joint where they can't move, that's where I go first," says Roncarati, who earlier this season helped All-Star point guard Jeff Teague (*pictured*) return in just one week from a sprained ankle. "My job is to be proactive. We want to help them from a regenerative, restorative standpoint."

—*Jamie Lisanti*

EDGE

During a "body vitamin" session to rehab lower-leg injuries, Roncarati uses various techniques to help prevent a recurrence of some of the NBA's most common maladies.



Lateral bounds

From a half squat position, shift weight to the outside leg, push off and jump outward to the side. Upon landing, immediately push off in the opposite direction.



Custom orthotics

An orthotist can create special insoles that should change a player's foot position so he does not land on the outside of it and become more vulnerable to injury.



Single leg calf raises

Stand on your toes on an edge, such as a stair. Raise and lower the heel by extending the ankle, and repeat.

For more athlete training profiles and tips, go to SI.com/edge

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Tucker Horak | *Rossville, Kans.* | *Football*

Tucker, a senior quarterback at Rossville High, scored three touchdowns, including a 65-yard fumble return, to defend the Class 3A title over Wichita's Collegiate High 20-19. Kansas's career TD leader (185), he's the state's first QB to exceed 2,000 yards in rushing (2,859) and passing (2,072) in a season.



Abby Levene | *Dublin, N.H.* | *Triathlon*

Levene, a graduate student of environmental journalism at Colorado, won the sprint-distance collegiate title in 1:02:39 at Lake Louisa State Park in Clermont, Fla. In August, Levene, who ran track and cross-country as an undergrad at Princeton and Colorado, took the Olympic-distance national title [2:06:09].



Phillip Rocha | *Azusa, Calif.* | *Cross-country*

Phillip, a senior at Arcadia High, took his second straight Division I state championship in 14:42.90 over the 5K course at Woodward Park in Fresno. In September he won the Stanford Invitational in a course-record 14:32.50, the top time in the state this season and second best in the nation.

FACES IN THE CROWD

Edited by ALEXANDRA FENWICK



Sarah Potomak | *Aldergrove, B.C.* | *Hockey*

Potomak, a freshman forward at Minnesota, had seven points (two goals, five assists) in an 11-1 win over Minnesota State, tying the school record. At week's end she led the nation in assists per game (1.63) and was fourth in points (2.12). Last month she helped Canada win silver in the Four Nations Cup.



Shawn Anderson | *New Castle, Pa.* | *Basketball*

Anderson, a 6' 4" sophomore guard at Navy, scored the go-ahead layup, then hit two foul shots with 16 seconds left to seal a 65-59 win over Penn. A week earlier he averaged 13.5 points to help Navy go 4-0 at the Spartan Showcase in Greensboro, N.C.; he was named the tournament's most outstanding player.



Jurnee Tipton | *Ypsilanti, Mich.* | *Volleyball*

Jurnee, a 5' 9" junior outside hitter at Father Gabriel Richard High, had 26 kills, a .658 hitting percentage and 11 digs in a sweep of defending champion North Branch High for the Class B state title. The Fighting Irish went 42-0, and Jurnee finished No. 2 on the team with 486 kills and a .358 hitting percentage.

Nominate Now ▼

To submit a candidate for Faces in the Crowd, go to SI.com/faces. For more on outstanding amateur athletes, follow @SI_Faces on Twitter.



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JUST MY TYPE

→ Interview by **DAN PATRICK**

DAN PATRICK: Did you celebrate your first win of the season [against the Lakers on Dec. 1]?

BRETT BROWN: A little bit. We feel a tiny bit guilty [for celebrating] because it is, like you say, just one win. But for our young team it matters. So there was a quiet, tiny celebration, and we're not ashamed of it.

DP: How do you make sure your young players don't get used to losing?

BB: I try to share stories about the privileges I had working with [Gregg Popovich] and the Spurs for 12 years. We [won] four NBA championships. I talk a lot about routine and knocking out good days. The greatest challenge is keeping the locker room together when you lose.

DP: Has losing played a role in [rookie center] Jahlil Okafor's off-the-court issues—speeding and getting into fights?

BB: We would all be naive to think it doesn't have some level of effect. [Jahlil] has been used to winning. He is one of the major faces of our program. He is a prideful young man. You add it all up, not to make excuses, but I think out of just fairness and reality . . . I believe a portion of it has impacted his mind-set.



BRETT BROWN

HOLDING IT TOGETHER

With the youngest NBA team [average age: 22.8], a 1-20 start and his top player suspended for off-the-court issues, the 54-year-old 76ers coach is still teaching the fundamentals.

DP: Have you talked to him about these issues?

BB: I have. I am the father of a teenager. You have a lot of responsibility to help them grow as people and as professionals. It's never ending. Apart from telling [the players], "this is how we're going to run a pick-and-roll" or what play we're gonna run, you have to put your parent hat on.

DP: How do you help young players without a lot of veterans on the team?

BB: This situation [with Jahlil] has forced everybody to look at things a bit more closely. As with anything, there are areas you wish you could do better or areas you're not proud of. The reality is we have to create an environment that is different to accommodate our young team. This is not a typical NBA job. We do have veterans, like Carl Landry, but a lot of it falls on me and the coaching staff. We're the senior voices. That's how the team has been built. It's my job to coach what we have and move it forward.

DP: Do you think Joel Embiid [who was drafted by the 76ers with the third pick in 2014 but has yet to play a game because of an injury to his right foot] will ever play for the 76ers?

BB: I do hold out hope. I think that we haven't skipped any steps with his recovery and return to play. So I do believe he will play for the 76ers. □

GUEST SHOTS SAY WHAT?



Hall of Fame guard **Jerry West** told

me it's difficult to watch Kobe Bryant play for the Lakers [3-17 through Sunday] in Bryant's final season. "[For] as much as he likes to win, now he's playing with a team that is not capable of winning at a high level," West said. "I don't know how he goes to bed at night." . . . NFL VP of officiating **Dean Blandino**



said the number of errors

his crews are making in games has not increased, despite the recent criticism: "I've been a part of this for 21 years, and I've never seen this much scrutiny. There's more outlets for people to communicate their opinions." . . . Warriors forward **Draymond Green**



discussed

the challenge of playing with Steph Curry. "Last year there were times we just sat there and watched Steph," Green told me. "[Coach] Steve Kerr used to say, 'Keep moving.' We've gotten a lot better."

NAUTICA VOYAGE

KNOW NO BOUNDARIES

THE FRAGRANCE FOR HIM



SPORTSMAN
OF THE YEAR*The Case for . . .***Jordan Spieth****BY MICHAEL BAMBERGER**

IF JORDAN SPIETH, the big-hearted golfing prodigy, is not named Sportsman of the Year, expect civil unrest. Middle-aged men in Under Armour windbreakers and soft-spike FootJoys will gather outside SI's offices, carrying placards marked 54 UNDER! in bold red ink. The 22-year-old Texan was 54 strokes below par in the four majors this year. The total winning score for all four majors was 58 under. He was there, there, there and there.

Consider, too, where and how he did it. Augusta in April is Augusta in April, the let's-get-this-party-started tournament that the kids grow up on these days. Spieth won the Masters by four without breaking a sweat, and at the end he stood on the home green and applauded the fans applauding him. Someone taught him manners. Tiger Woods won the 1997 Masters at 21 years and three months with a record score of 18 under. Spieth was 21 and eight months, and now he shares the scoring record with Woods.

In June the U.S. Open was played at a gorgeous, newish, half-ridiculous county course

near Tacoma, Wash., called Chambers Bay. While playing the 18th hole in the Friday round, Spieth, speaking to his caddie but with a Fox boom mike hovering nearby, said, "This is the dumbest hole I've ever played in my life." If the golf gods don't like a player, they will destroy him for such candor. They must like Jordan. On Sunday, playing in the penultimate twosome, Spieth made a birdie 4 on that same hole to finish five under, then watched as Dustin Johnson, the final golfer on the final green, needed three putts from 12 feet to close at four under. That home green had more bumps than a Lego. Spieth had been given a gift. He let the world know that he felt DJ's pain. You can't teach grace.

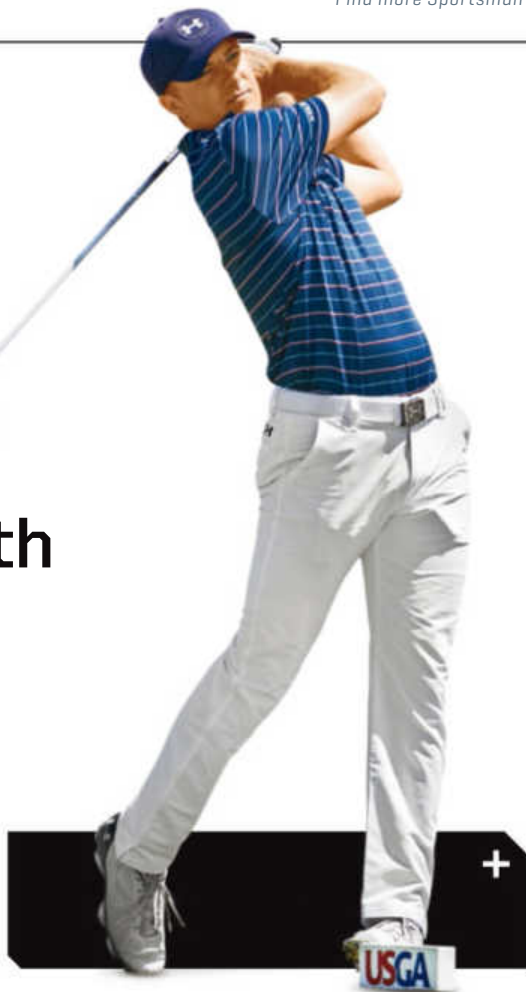
In July the British Open was at

The Old Course. Spieth finished a shot out of a three-man playoff. The previous week he had played in the John Deere Classic in East Moline, Ill. He could have skipped the Quad Cities event and gone to Scotland early, to acclimate and prepare. But he had won the JDC in 2014 and had promised to defend his title, and that is what he did, winning in a playoff. Do-the-right-thing, taught by example.

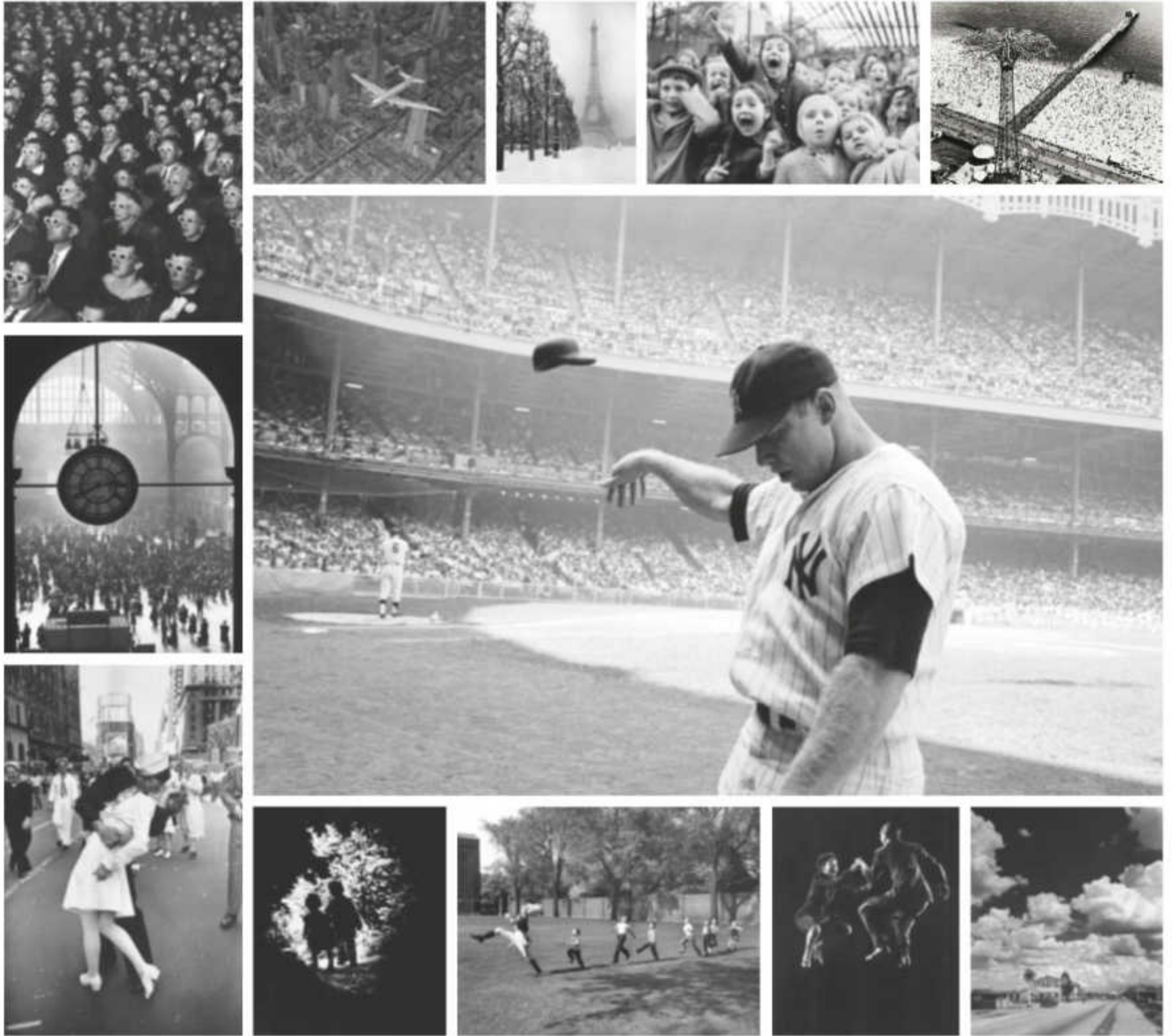
There were other highlights in a season that will go down as one of the five or 10 best in the (roughly) 150-year history of professional golf. In August, Spieth took solo second at the PGA Championship at Whistling Straits, near the factory town of Kohler, Wis. In September he won the Tour Championship at East Lake, in Atlanta—the course Bobby Jones grew up playing—and with it the FedEx Cup. In October, at the Presidents Cup in South Korea, he was the buoyant epicenter of the winning team, as the U.S. beat the Internationals by a point.

So, yes, this Jordan Spieth was a big-time big winner in 2015. But the name of the honor under discussion here is *Sportsman of the Year*. That's why he's most deserving. He made a record \$22 million playing golf this year, and he will give millions of it to the charitable foundation named for his family. His younger sister, Ellie, has special needs, and Jordan's relationship with her is beyond tender and inspiring. He fills up reporters' notebooks with honest observations, he chats and high-fives with his fans, he thanks his caddie and instructor and parents at every turn. In discussing his wins, the word you hear again and again is *we*. Memo to the SI brain trust: Keep the peace. Make Jordan the SOTY. □

He made
a record
\$22 million
this year,
and
he'll give
millions
of it
to the
charitable
foundation
named for
his family.



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KEY STAT

Watson threw for 289 yards and three touchdowns and ran for 131 and another two scores against North Carolina, but the most meaningful number to him was the one written on his wristband.

Photograph by
Chris Keane for Sports Illustrated



SOPH RISING

▼▼▼
As Clemson
quarterback
Deshaun Watson
checks off items
on his childhood
bucket list, his
dreams only
grow bigger

BY PETE THAMEL

THE FOUNDATION of Clemson quarterback Deshaun Watson's success was poured in 2004, beneath a four-bedroom house on Thorn Bush Drive in Gainesville, Ga., three miles and a world away from the government-subsidized housing projects at 815 Harrison Square where he'd spent the first 11 years of

his life. His mother, Deann, the only one of six siblings to finish high school, had craved a better environment for her family, one where her four kids could leave their bikes out on the porch at night, play outside after dark and not worry about drug dealers or stray bullets. For two years she volunteered with Habitat for Humanity, then one overcast November morning in 2006 the family pulled into the driveway for the first time.

As if Deshaun weren't excited enough about the house, he nearly burst when he saw Falcons star running back Warrick Dunn standing out front. Dunn's charity, Home for the Holidays, has augmented Habitat for Humanity's work since 1997 by supplying furniture, computers, housewares and food to more than 140 families. Dunn handed the keys to the Watsons and posed for photos. "I played as him on video games," Watson says now with a smile, "and he's sitting right there giving us a house and giving us furniture and food. I was jumping for joy."

The house evolved into a home, a place where young Deshaun had fewer distractions, a clearer focus and could dream bigger and bolder. In 2011, as a sophomore at Gainesville High, Watson emerged as one of the country's top quarterback prospects, and he committed to Clemson in February 2012. That winter he jotted down his goals on a piece of notebook paper that's still stashed somewhere in the cozy beige house. They included: Win the ACC championship, win the national championship, win the Heisman Trophy and be in position after three years to graduate from Clemson and have a chance to play in the NFL.

Clemson, riding its first undefeated season since 1981 and the top playoff seed, nailed down one of those goals with a 45-37 victory over North Carolina in the ACC title game, and now Watson is in position to check off several more boxes on his list. With 3,517 yards passing and 887 yards rushing for 41 total touchdowns, Watson has been named a Heisman Trophy finalist. And he may already be the country's most tantalizing NFL quarterback prospect even though he's only a sophomore and isn't eligible for the draft until 2017. "He can be as good as there's ever been here," says Clemson coach Dabo Swinney. "I think he's already in that conversation right now."

With everything going his way, Watson has added another goal to his list. He wants to be like Warrick Dunn, giving back to low-income families. "He inspired me," says Watson, "to do the same thing."



CHAD MORRIS remembers pulling out his cellphone on a blustery night four years ago and calling Swinney. "I saw Vince Young in person in high school, and he was very, very good," Morris, now SMU's coach but Clemson's offensive coordinator at the time, says he told Swinney. "But this kid Deshaun Watson is better than Vince Young."

Swinney responded, "What?"

Morris didn't back down: "This guy is a better high school player than Vince Young."

It wasn't the first time Watson had impressed at Gainesville High, an AAAAA power. As an eighth-grader playing spring football with the varsity, he completed 22 of 25 passes. Coach Bruce Miller, who is 216-133 in 28 seasons as a high school coach, had started only two freshmen at any position in his career. Watson became the third, winning the job in



“I played as him on video games,” Watson says of Dunn, “and he’s sitting there giving us a house. I was jumping for joy.”



summer camp and debuting against always strong Buford High. Gainesville lost the game 40–19 but found a quarterback who started every game for the next four years. “He threw three touchdown passes,” says Miller, “and nobody’s asked a question since.”

At Gainesville, Watson would arrive at school at 7 a.m. four days a week to watch an hour of film with Michael Perry, the offensive coordinator. Perry provided the sausage biscuits from a local greasy spoon, Longstreet Cafe, and a buffet of different film options. In season, they’d study clips of opposing defenses to tailor the game plan of Gainesville’s West Virginia–inspired Air Raid offense. Watson caught on fast. During the ninth game of his sophomore year, an opponent flashed an exotic two-man coverage that the Red Elephants hadn’t practiced against since summer camp. Watson identified it immediately, audibled and threw a dig route for a 70-yard touchdown. “Coach

MAN AT ARMS

Watson celebrated against South Carolina (left) and tore up the Tar Heels (far left) a day after meeting with Dunn (below).

Miller and Coach Perry made sure I stayed prepared,” says Watson.

The early-morning film sessions continued in the off-season. Watson and Perry would analyze college cutups or NFL All-22 film of Peyton Manning and Tom Brady. (Watson still pops in for film sessions or quarterback drills when home on break.) As a junior, Watson led the Red Elephants to the school’s first state

championship in 87 years. He finished his career as the state’s record holder in total offense (17,134 yards), total touchdowns (218) and passing yards (13,077). Perhaps most impressive, in a state where the elite teams routinely produce a half-dozen ACC or SEC players, Watson was the lone Power 5 recruit on Gainesville’s state championship team.

But more than the records, Watson and the coaches remember the ride home from the Georgia Dome after dominating Ware County, 49–13, in the title game. Highway patrolmen greeted the team bus at the city limits and escorted it with sirens blazing. The procession arrived at the school near 1 a.m., yet hundreds of fans were waiting. “People were literally crying tears of joy on the field,” Perry says. “Football means everything around here. It determines the happiness of a lot of people every Friday night.”

IN 2011, when Watson was a Gainesville freshman, his mother called him into the family living room. She was crying. She revealed that the strep throat she’d been battling was actually tongue cancer. “I just started bawling,” Deshaun says.

Before Deshaun rallied the community by winning the state title, the community rallied around his family. When Deann, an application specialist for the Gainesville Housing Authority, began treatment at Emory University Hospital in Atlanta, about 50 miles away, Deshaun’s Aunt Sonia and Uncle Terri Watson would sometimes host him and his siblings, Detrick, then 21, and twins Tyreke and Tinisha, 12. Some nights Deshaun would stay with his best friend, Fred Payne, and another aunt, Yolanda Glasper, also helped out. (Deshaun says he has no relationship with his father.) Coach Miller had seen enough young men without father figures get girls pregnant in high school that he took it upon himself to give Deshaun a birds-and-bees talk. “I said, ‘That will mess everything up,’” Miller says. “And he never said a word, like you would if your dad was having a father-son talk with you.” Miller pauses and shrugs, “So far there’s no little Deshauns walking around.”

Deann didn’t want Deshaun to suffer with her as she battled her illness. When she underwent chemotherapy and radiation, lost her hair and endured surgeries that removed her tongue and then reconstructed it, she didn’t allow her three youngest kids to visit. “I didn’t want to turn their lives upside down,” she says.

Deshaun called his mom every night, talking to her and waiting for her to write down responses on a piece of paper so the nurse could read them to him. Deann endured about six months of treatment, motivated through the grueling rehab and the lonely nights by one thing. “Her family pushed her through everything,” says Sonia. “Being there for her children really gave her so much strength.”

Deann tells her story while sitting on a couch at Sonia’s house, where

▶▶▶ PLAYOFF PREVIEW

an orange Clemson ornament hangs on the Christmas tree and ESPN, playing on mute, reveals Clemson as No. 1 yet again. Deann's speech has improved enough that she can communicate, but it's not as clear as she'd like. In February she'll be cancer free for four years, and she wears a necklace with a small key engraved with the word HOPE. Deshaun gave it to her. "I really am blessed," she says.

THE PLAY was a simple bootleg, but it was Watson's first *moment* as a Tiger. He'd enrolled early, in January 2014, so instead of enjoying the wind down of his senior year in high school, he was enjoying spring practice. As Watson sprinted out, 270-pound defensive end Shaq Lawson came bearing down on him. Watson could have simply outrun Lawson to the sideline and stepped out-of-bounds. Instead he faked in one direction with his hips, then stopped on a dime. Lawson flew past, and Watson calmly zipped a 60-yard touch-down pass to fellow-freshman receiver Artavis Scott. "How the heck did that just happen?" recalls senior guard Eric Mac Lain. "I watched [former Clemson All-America QB] Tajh Boyd for four years. I never saw him make a play like that. This kid just stepped on campus and was phenomenal."

Less than two seasons into his college career, Watson has pushed Clemson from a fringe title contender best known for unexpectedly losing big games to lesser teams to a legitimate title threat. Watson came in with five-star billing but lacked any of the Johnny or Jameis drama associated with top quarterbacks over the past few years. He battled through three significant injuries during his first year on campus—



MASK AND RECEIVE

After injuries his first year raised questions about his durability, Watson played hard in 2015 without missing any time.

a broken collarbone in the spring, a broken finger midway through the season and a torn ACL that he played through in the regular-season finale, a 35–17 win over South Carolina. "Clemson isn't a place for prima donnas," says Boyd. Swinney sums up Watson's two-year career succinctly: "He's never lost a game that he's finished."

In Clemson's spread attack, Watson has evolved this season to become a more accurate passer. He has completed 69.5% of his passes, and Wake Forest coach Dave Clawson says he has been most impressed with Watson's accuracy on deep balls. Watson has also been clutch, completing 42 of 56 fourth-quarter passes, the sixth-best mark in the country. And he may be the game's most menacing running threat on the zone read (5.4 per carry). He's 6' 2" and 210 pounds and athletic enough that he scissored his legs and leaped over N.C. State corner Jack Tocho last season on his way to viral GIF celebrity. His speed on the edge, combined with the burst of sophomore tailback Wayne Gallman and the deep threats of receivers Scott, Deon Cain and Charone Peake, has kept defenses off balance all year. "It's just 60 minutes of pure torture for a defensive coach," says Clemson defensive coordinator Brent Venables. And it all starts with Watson.

RICHARD SHIRO/AP (WATSON); JED JACOBSON/ILLUSTRATED (MCCAFFREY)

SI'S HEISMAN PICKS

To settle on our Heisman winner, we polled 14 of SI and SI.com's college football writers and editors. Players received five points for a first-place vote, down to one point for fifth place.

Christian McCaffrey
RB Stanford
54 points

The sophomore broke Barry Sanders's 27-year-old NCAA single-season record for all-purpose yards with 3,250,

including a whopping 461 in the Cardinal's 41–22 romp over USC in the Pac-12 championship last Saturday. McCaffrey

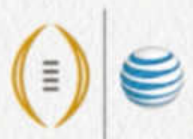


has 1,847 yards rushing, 540 receiving, 67 on punt returns and 1,042 on kickoff returns. He's also thrown for two TDs.



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HOLD THE POSE

Swinney, Watson and assorted Tigers made their Heisman votes clear while celebrating with the ACC trophy after beating UNC.

AT THE First Baptist Church of Mauldin (S.C.) in July, Deshaun Watson stood before a crowd of more than 200 and saw smaller versions of himself. After Watson approached the Clemson staff about becoming more involved with Habitat for Humanity in the off-season, they facilitated the dinner so Watson could connect with families attempting to overcome struggles like his did.

Deshaun told the audience how a new home changed his life athletically, academically and socially. He talked about his mother's cancer and about his hard work on the football field. He followed the speech with three hours of autographs, pictures and conversation. "We believe and hope that Deshaun gets his wish—to become a spokesman for Habitat in the years ahead when he's playing in the NFL," says Monroe Free, the president and CEO of Habitat for Humanity Greenville County.

In gestures large and small, conscientiousness runs through everything Watson does. In March 2014 he appeared at the fourth-birthday party of the nephew of his fourth-grade teacher, Leslie Frierson. He consistently texts Morris's son, Chandler, and daughter, Mackenzie, before their high school games. "He's always worried about everyone but himself," says Morris.

That includes his mother, who is looking forward to the Heisman ceremony—it will be her first trip to New York City—but even more so to Deshaun's graduation next December. "I think that watching his mom go through what she was going through, he realized that he needed a plan for making sure he could take care of his family," says Frierson. "He takes that very seriously."

On the Friday night before the conference title game, the ACC held a Night of Legends. The guest list included Warrick Dunn, who played at Florida State. Dunn had a faint memory that one of the many families he'd helped along the way was Deshaun's, and the pair



"How the heck did that just happen," recalls Mac Lain. "This kid just stepped on campus, and he was phenomenal."



chatted for about 10 minutes outside the Charlotte Convention Center. Watson also let Dunn know his plans to pay things forward. Dunn feigned anger that Watson had led the Tigers to a 23–13 victory over his Seminoles earlier this year, but in truth he was moved. "It's crazy to have an impact in the community and see it trickle down," Dunn says. "If he's able to continue to do the things he's doing, it can keep influencing kids."

Watson still writes 815 on his wristband before each game to remind himself of the Harrison Square projects he came from. And with every item he checks off his list of goals, his potential to help more families grows. "This," Dunn says, "is a fairy tale." □

Deshaun Watson
QB Clemson
50 points

Besides leading the No. 1 Tigers to a 13–0 record, the heady sophomore was the only player in the FBS to throw for more

than 3,000 yards and rush for more than 750. He completed 69.5% of his passes (for 30 TDs), and his completion

percentage in road games (.714) and in the fourth quarter (.750) ranks second and sixth, respectively, in FBS.



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HAPPENS
IN





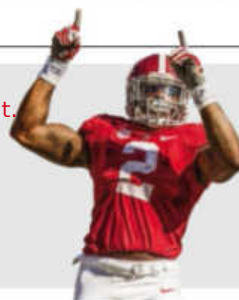
STEAMROLL, TIDE

Henry carried 44 times for 189 yards to lead Bama to the SEC title, leaving the conference mark and Florida defenders in his wake.

Derrick Henry
RB Alabama
45 points

The bruising junior led the nation in both rushing yards (1,986) and rushing TDs (23), and gained 68.9% of

his yards after contact. Henry is one of only three backs in SEC history to have four 200-yard games in a



season, with none being more impressive than his 46-carry, 271-yard day in Bama's 29-13 defeat of Auburn on Nov. 28.



YASHA HUNT/AL.COM/LANDOV (HENRY, BOTTOM); GREG NELSON FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (MAYFIELD)

CAMPUS RUSH

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF PREVIEW

MAXIMUM IMPACT

No back gets more mileage out of brute force than Alabama junior Derrick Henry, who hits the hole like a freight train as he reduces some of the most hallowed rushing records to dust



BY ANDY STAPLES

Photographs by
Scott Cunningham
For Sports Illustrated



BOBBY RAMSAY saw the look every day at practice for four seasons. The Yulee (Fla.) High coach also saw it on Friday nights in the fall. Now he sees it when he watches Alabama play. The look, Ramsay says, mixes a hint of fear with heaps of resignation and a trace of dread. No matter whether the player is bound for the NFL or the LSAT, would-be tacklers all appear the same when 6' 3", 242-pound junior Derrick Henry takes a handoff and hits the hole: Their shoulders slump, faces sag and bodies tense in anticipation of the collision to come.

"It's more like thrusting yourself into something you know is going to be unpleasant, but you do it anyway," says Ramsay, who coached Henry from 2009 to '12. "Then you're hanging on for dear life. Then you're going back to the huddle thinking, *I have to do that again?*"

Ramsay knows this look well because three years before Henry broke Herschel Walker's 34-year-old SEC single-season rushing record with 1,986 yards—and counting—to become a Heisman Trophy finalist, he finished his Yulee career with 12,212, crushing Ken (the Sugar Land Express) Hall's 59-year-old national high school mark. Ramsay also knows how a Henry run feels because he stood directly behind the linebackers when the Hornets did full-contact running drills. "The only thing I

Baker Mayfield
QB Oklahoma
24 points

No contender was more unknown when the season began—Sooners coach Bob Stoops didn't even recognize Mayfield

at a team event last January—than the junior transfer from Texas Tech. Mayfield, who ranks second in the FBS

in pass efficiency, led Oklahoma into the CFP by throwing for 3,389 yards and 35 TDs, with only five interceptions.



▼▼▼ PLAYOFF PREVIEW

can equate it to,” Ramsay says, “is standing on the sidewalk and a jeep goes by doing 40.”

Nearly everyone tasked with tackling Henry or coaching people to tackle Henry has a vehicular analogy—but most choose a more menacing mode of transportation. “It’s literally like a freight train hitting you,” says Gunnar Cox, a Jacksonville safety who had to bring down Henry in practice as a 5’ 8”, 165-pound Yulee linebacker. Cox learned early not to hit Henry head-on. No matter. If Cox tried to take a better angle, Henry would stiff-arm Cox and carry him for five to 10 yards.

“I don’t know if fast-moving semi is a good visual,” says Florida coach Jim McElwain, whose defense gave up 189 yards to Henry during No. 2 Alabama’s 29–15 win in Saturday’s SEC championship game in Atlanta. “There was this movie one time about this train that was, like, out of control, going really fast and they had to stop it before it blew up the city.” (That would be *Unstoppable*, with Denzel Washington.)

“McElwain described it perfectly,” says Chris Murdock, a North Florida student who played alongside Henry as a 5’ 7”, 180-pound Yulee linebacker. “Imagine a train coming at you or just running into a big concrete wall.”

Henry calls to mind Eric Dickerson and Eddie George, 6’ 3” runners with speed, power and agility who showed that a higher center of gravity isn’t an impediment to racking up yards. But because of the way the game has changed—offenses have spread the field, and NFL teams have been reluctant to spend huge money on backs—it’s almost surprising that someone with Henry’s build and burst wound up carrying the ball instead of chasing quarterbacks. That, coaches and family members say, happened only because Henry refused to contemplate doing anything else.

THOSE CLOSE to Henry call him Shocka, the nickname his paternal grandmother, Gladys, coined when she learned her teenage son, also named Derrick, was going to become a father himself. Surrounded by Florida fans, Shocka grew to idolize Tim Tebow, the jumbo-sized QB who piled up yards and touchdowns in winning two national championships and the 2007 Heisman.



DOUBLE DUTY

The heavy load Henry has happily shouldered after the injury to Drake (above, right) makes his Heisman case all the more compelling.



Henry’s Tebowesque tendency to run over defenders gained notice early. J.T. Medley, who coached Henry in middle school, recalls that Nassau County made a rule that required coaches to pull starters when a team went up by 18 points—a regulation that he believes was put in place to keep Henry from scoring so much. During one game when Henry was an eighth-grader, Yulee’s principal came to the sideline to make sure Medley followed the rule. It was the first quarter.

As a junior, Henry and Ramsay met with then Florida coach Will Muschamp and defensive coordinator Dan Quinn. Ramsay assumed Henry would play tailback for the Gators, but Muschamp and Quinn liked Henry as a defender. So did plenty of other colleges. Those coaches stressed the money defensive ends and rush linebackers can make in an NFL that places the highest value on quarterbacks and the players who sack them. They pointed out the longer average careers of pass rushers compared to running backs. Henry didn’t care. He wanted to carry the ball.

Dalvin Cook
RB Florida St.
21 points

The Seminole sophomore ran for 1,648 yards and 18 TDs, but the stat that best captures his explosiveness is his



eye-popping average of 7.9 yards per carry, second best in the nation and tops among Power 5 backs. The

average length of his rushing TDs is 33.3 yards. And he did it while battling hamstring and ankle injuries.



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OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE
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DEFLECTED GLORY

Emerging as a team leader after a strong 2014 season, the low-key Henry credits all his success to the O-line.

Mark Richt preferred that Henry do that at Georgia, and Henry was prepared to, but Alabama didn't give up. Eventually coach Nick Saban and running backs coach Burton Burns persuaded Henry that their pro-style offense perfectly suited his downhill style. Henry chose the Crimson Tide in a televised announcement on the morning of his head-to-head showdown with future Florida back Kelvin Taylor, who played for Glades Day in Belle Glade, Fla. Then Henry outrushed Taylor 363 yards to 222 in a 42-6 Hornets win.

The two clashed again last Saturday, and Henry's team again emerged victorious. Two years earlier Henry wondered if he'd chosen correctly in going to Tuscaloosa. The Tide had just concluded the regular season of his freshman year with an Iron Bowl loss to Auburn on the Kick Six, and for Christmas break he went home to Yulee (pop. 11,491), a dot between Jacksonville and the resorts of Amelia Island, where Georgians used to buy lottery tickets before their state got a lottery of its own. During that visit Henry made clear that he was unhappy. After carrying only 27 times in his first 12 games, Henry poured out his frustration to his family and the high school coaches he considered family. Team Henry convened a meeting one night in Medley's kitchen. "He wasn't used to disappointment," says Pat Dunlap, another Yulee High assistant close to Henry. "He wasn't used to things not immediately going his way."

The coaches asked Henry if he had made his feelings known to Saban. Henry admitted he hadn't; he didn't want to seem like a whiner. They told him he needed to meet with Saban and Burns when he returned to Tuscaloosa and discuss his concerns like a man. Medley stressed that while uncomfortable, such conversations come with being an adult. "You're going to get a boss one day," Medley says. "You're going to need to be able to argue your point and sell yourself and your



College recruiters pointed out the longer average careers of pass rushers. Henry didn't care. He wanted to carry the ball.



self-worth." Meanwhile, Henry's father urged him to return to campus with a good attitude. "We told him to stick it out," Derrick Sr. says. "You never know how things are going to turn out. Tough times don't last."

They didn't. Before Henry returned to school, Medley called ahead to apprise Saban and Burns. The Tide coaches were stunned to hear that Henry was unhappy. They said he had made exemplary progress as a freshman; in fact, he had practiced so well before the break that they intended get Henry carries behind sophomore back T.J. Yeldon in the Sugar Bowl against Oklahoma. After meeting with Saban and Burns, Henry wound up carrying eight times for 100 yards and a touchdown in Alabama's 45-31 loss.

At that point Henry knew where he stood with the

Leonard Fournette
RB LSU
9 points

He was the clear front-runner for the Heisman through the first two months of the season, but a second-half



slump—lowlighted by a 19-carry, 31-yard, one-TD performance in a 30-16 loss to seventh-ranked Alabama on Nov. 7—hurt

his candidacy. Still, the sophomore rumbled for 1,741 yards and 18 TDs this fall, and averaged 6.4 yards per carry.

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Count On
Holiday Party
Shenanigans*

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coaches. He gained 990 yards on 5.8 per carry as a sophomore, and after Alabama's Sugar Bowl loss to Ohio State on Jan. 1, Henry knew the rest of the team now looked to him as a leader. That's why even on spring break in Panama City Beach, Fla., last March, Henry led teammates through workouts in the sand. "We were on the beach doing push-ups and sit-ups," senior linebacker Reggie Ragland says, smiling. "Just normal stuff, keeping our bodies fit for the girls." In the summer Henry posted Instagram videos of himself pushing Medley's Ford F-150 pickup and flipping tires. When he saw the videos on the news a few hours later, the attention-averse Henry took them down.

Henry was wise to prepare so thoroughly, because college was about to feel a lot more like high school. Saban had planned to split carries this season between Henry and senior Kenyan Drake, just as he had between Henry and Yeldon, Yeldon and Eddie Lacy, Lacy and Trent Richardson. Saban wants his runners to have fresh legs, and he uses his platoon system as a recruiting pitch, telling backs they won't endure too much wear on their way to the NFL. But with Henry running so well, he shouldered much of the load even before Drake broke his right arm against Mississippi State in Week 11. While outgaining LSU sophomore back Leonard Fournette 210 to 31 on Nov. 7, Henry carried 38 times—including 12 on the final possession when Alabama milked the final 9:18 off the clock. Against Auburn the Tide handed off to Henry 19 times in the fourth quarter. He finished with 271 yards, breaking Bo Jackson's Iron Bowl record on a career-high 46 totes. Those who know Henry back in Yulee say he needs at least 25 carries to get properly warmed up, and Alabama senior center Ryan Kelly marvels at Henry's ability to get stronger through the fourth quarter. "You think, This is probably starting to add up on his body a little bit, but he never shows it, never talks about it, never complains," Kelly says.

After the Auburn game, reporters asked Henry about his workload. "The ball isn't that heavy," he said. Henry had used a variation of that same line—first made famous by USC coach John McKay in 1967—on Nov. 16, 2012 when he broke Hall's record. Ramsay's main concern that season was convincing opposing coaches and parents that his jumbo back belonged in high school. "The only person with a more controversial birth certificate was Barack Obama," Ramsay says.

The coach knew about Hall's mark but couldn't see how the math would work. Henry needed 3,369 yards as a senior. The problem solved itself: Without other options Ramsay had to keep feeding his big back.



FACE VALUE

Henry didn't like how Saban used him as a freshman, but being named MVP on Saturday brought out a smile.

When Henry gained 455 yards in a November win against West Nassau High, he was in striking distance, and he broke through in Yulee's first playoff game, finishing the season with 4,261 yards and 55 touchdowns on 462 carries.

HENRY WON'T rush that much for the Tide, but his increased workload allowed him to break the SEC yardage record set by the platinum standard for SEC backs. Asked just how good Henry is, Ragland fires back, "He passed Herschel Walker, didn't he?" Henry broke Walker's record while playing two more games, but he did it on 39 fewer carries than Walker had in 1981.

On Saturday, Henry will try to replicate what Walker did in 1982, when he hoisted the Heisman Trophy. As his candidacy progressed, Henry asked his inner circle not to talk about the Heisman no matter how much reporters asked. In interviews, he refused to take credit for his yardage—dishing it instead to his offensive line. "He's going to give all the credit to us," Kelly says, "but I'll give the credit to him." If Henry is indeed the locomotive his former tacklers claim him to be, he is carrying an entire offense on board. "I don't know that I've coached many players that actually set a better example to affect other people," Saban says. "He doesn't really do it for himself. He does it for them."

Just another way Henry makes a big impact. □

A CAR WEBSITE FOR PEOPLE WHO DIDN'T KNOW THEY'D LIKE A CAR WEBSITE

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PREVIEW REVIEW

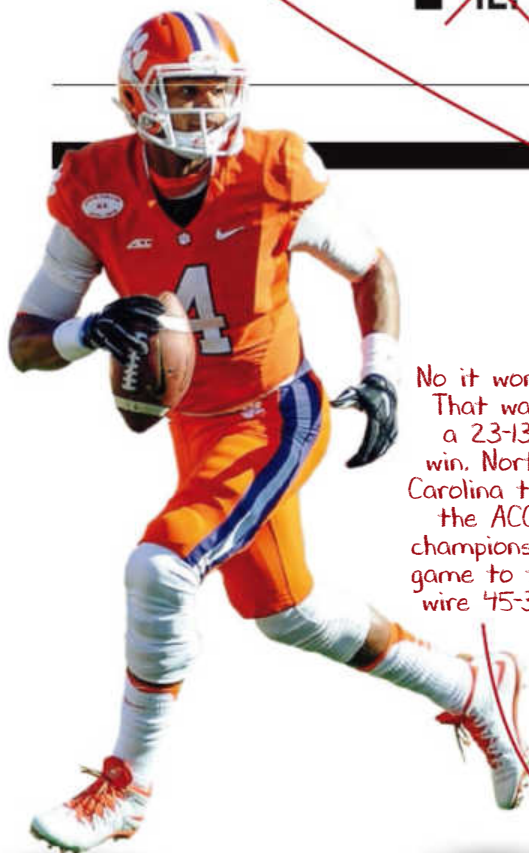
SI scribes take a look back at their preseason write-ups for the final four teams and take note of what they got right—and wrong

Um, it looks as if they figured it out: 12th in total offense.

~~12~~ CLEMSON

◆ BY / ZAC ELLIS

Wow, the Tigers fell all the way to ninth this year, 4.68 yards per play.



No it won't: That was a 23-13 win. North Carolina took the ACC championship game to the wire 45-37.

Injury-free in '15!

THE QB OF THE FUTURE IS HERE

A broken right index finger and a torn left ACL couldn't prevent the arrival of quarterback **Deshawn Watson**. Despite missing nearly seven full games with injuries, he threw for 1,466 yards and 14 touchdowns as a freshman and looked every bit the five-star signee he was. Now healthy, Watson says, "I want to come back even better."

With the departure of offensive coordinator

Check.

▼▼▼ SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

Clemson can work out the kinks against Wofford and Appalachian State before its season-defining stretch: a Thursday-night trip to Louisville (Sept. 17), followed by daunting home games against Notre Dame and Georgia Tech. If the Tigers make it through mid-October unbeaten, a visit from **Florida State** (Nov. 7) will be the biggest obstacle in their quest for an ACC championship.

Peters. Still, coach Dabo Swinney says, the unit "is talented—maybe more talented." Junior ends Shaq Lawson and Kevin Dodd and senior tackle D.J. Reader lead a rebuilt front, with sophomore corner **Mackensie Alexander** heading up the secondary. □

Chad Morris to SMU, **Tony Elliott and Jeff Scott** jointly take over a fast-paced unit that has just one starting lineman returning—center Ryan Norton—but plenty of talent: 6' 4" junior wide-out Mike Williams (57 catches for 1,030 yards), sophomore receiver Artavis Scott (76 catches, 965 yards) and sophomore running back Wayne Gallman (769 rushing yards in '14).

After leading the country in total defense last fall (4.0 yards per play), the Tigers have to replace All-America linemen Vic Beasley and Grady Jarrett and two All-ACC picks, line-backer Stephone Anthony and corner Garry

projected first round



▼▼▼

X-FACTOR

As a freshman All-America, **Shaq Lawson** had 35 tackles (10 for loss) and four sacks. He followed that up in 2014 with 44 tackles and 3½ sacks. Now, after a mass exodus of Tigers linemen, much more will be expected from the 6' 3", 275-pound junior. Lawson's off to a good start: Dabo Swinney raved about his pass rushing during the spring.

Expectations met: 54 tackles, 2½ for a loss!

Coker is your guy.
Start him in every
game, especially
against, say, Ole Miss.

Foster was lost for the
season with a right-shoulder
injury suffered in the
Ole Miss game. But Coconut
Creek, Fla., native Calvin
Ridley caught 75 passes for
893 yards and five TDs.



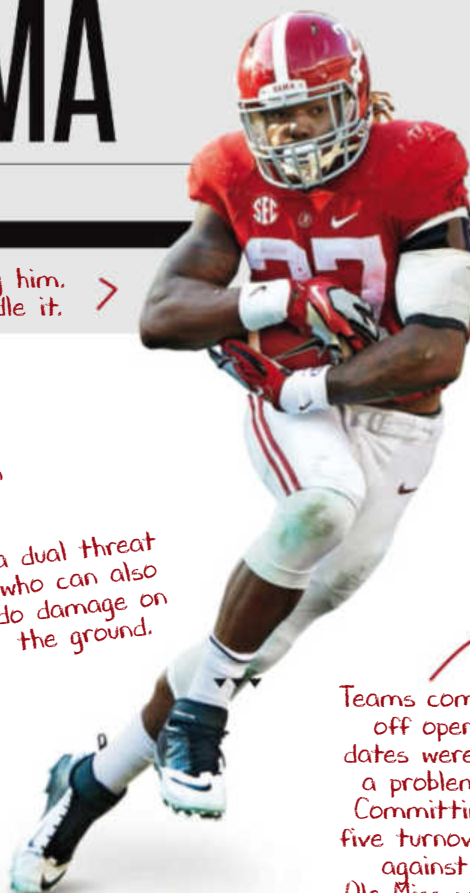
X-FACTOR

Last year Lane Kiffin ran the offense through receiver Amari Cooper; the most likely candidate to fill Cooper's spot is **Robert Foster**, a 6' 2", 194-pound sophomore. Foster, who had just six catches for 44 yards, can't hope to match the All-America's record-breaking production. But he must keep defenses from packing the box to stuff the run; that will open up the field for whichever quarterback emerges.

5.2 ALABAMA

BY / ANDY STAPLES

Keep feeding him.
He can handle it.



SABAN'S CHOICE

Cooper Bateman

For the second consecutive season Alabama enters camp with a quarterback competition. Senior Jake Coker, the Florida State transfer, will try to fend off ~~freshman David Cornwell, a highly regarded drop-back passer.~~ Coach Nick Saban has offered no timetable for a decision, so the winner might not be known until the first game.

a dual threat
who can also
do damage on
the ground.

Whoever runs the offense, he'll have to operate **quickly and decisively**. In their first year under coordinator Lane Kiffin, the Tide averaged 9.2 more plays than in 2013. The QB's job will be made easier by a one-two wallop of running backs in junior **Derrick Henry** (6' 3", 242 pounds) and senior speedster Kenyan Drake (4.4 in the 40).

The line is anchored by sophomore left tackle Cam Robinson (6' 6", 326 pounds), who's one of two Outland Award contenders in Tuscaloosa with senior center Ryan Kelly.

The defense allowed only 3.2 yards a rush last season, and a deep front led by 6' 4", 312-pound junior A'Shawn Robinson should keep that number low. Improvements to a pass rush that finished 60th in sacks per game (2.2) will help a secondary that has lagged; in the Tide's Sugar Bowl loss, Ohio State completed third-and-long passes of 26, 26, 40 and 47 yards. **Shifting junior Eddie Jackson from corner to safety will help against the spread.** □

Teams coming
off open
dates weren't
a problem.
Committing
five turnovers
against
Ole Miss was.

SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

The Tide get four opponents coming off byes, including three in a row starting on Oct. 17 (at Texas A&M, Tennessee, LSU). That run against tough SEC teams with fresh legs comes after a couple of ground-and-pound matchups: at Georgia on Oct. 3, Arkansas on Oct. 10. The season ends with hard trips to Mississippi State and Auburn, sandwiched around Charleston Southern at home.

So did freshman Minkah
Fitzpatrick, who emerged as a
star at the fifth DB position.

They talked about a chip before the Big Ten title game too. MSU fabricates more chips than Microsoft.

Should have thought of Michigan's punt team. My bad.

~~7~~³ MICHIGAN STATE

◆ BY / BRIAN HAMILTON

LET THE CHIPS FALL

Make it five of six.

The Spartans have won 11 or more games in four of the last five seasons. Still, they treat success with wariness. Their workout shirts feature pictures of poker chips on the shoulders. (Get it?)

Last season they finished fifth in the final polls after a 42-41 Cotton Bowl victory over Baylor; to open spring practice, coach Mark Dantonio reminded them they had failed to accomplish their goals. "What we hang on to," says senior defensive end **Shilique Calhoun** of his team's motivation, "is losing."

The reality? Michigan State is a team with top-shelf players and top-end consistency worthy of championship expectations. Senior quarterback Connor **Cook**, a potential first-rounder next April, has thrown 32 more touchdowns than interceptions the last two years. Tackle Jack Conklin, a 6' 6", 317-pound junior who could have been drafted in round 1 last spring, anchors a line that allowed only 11 sacks in 2014. Calhoun also returned, to boost a defense that has allowed just 18.3 points per game since 2010.

For all its talent and reliability, Michigan State might still miss out on the playoff—its two defeats in 2014 were to the teams that played for the national title. "A lot of people give us credit right now," Dantonio says. "We have to reach higher."

My personal contribution to Sparty's stack of chips.

Nothing potential about it now.

Dops, big drop off in 2015: surrendered 17 sacks, 20.5 points per game.



X-FACTOR

In a former life **Lawrence Thomas** was a four-star linebacker recruit. Now he's a 6' 4", 300-pound senior D-lineman who will shift between end and tackle depending on the personnel package. If Thomas can improve his sack numbers—he had three in '14—he can keep teams from sliding protection to Shilique Calhoun, much as now-graduated Marcus Rush did for the last three years.

SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

Actually, top three.

A high-impact visit from Oregon on Sept. 12 won't determine whether the Spartans are a playoff contender—but it will define the context of their season. Win, and they're a top five team. Lose, and the margin for error in Big Ten play is zero, with road games at Michigan, Nebraska and OSU. That Nov. 21 tilt with the Buckeyes screams playoff play-in.

Smile, swirl brandy.

The SEC is overrated, proclaimed linebacker Eric Striker, and that was before the Sooners rallied from a 17-point deficit for a 31-24, double-overtime win. He was right.

At 32, Riley is already being talked about for head-coaching jobs.

21-4 OKLAHOMA

BY / LINDSAY SCHNELL



Oklahoma ranked 18th in rushing with 2,820 yards. Perine contributed 1,291.

Called it!

WHO WILL PILOT THE AIR RAID?

Don't believe everything you hear, says coach Bob Stoops. While popular chatter in Norman would indicate that the quarterback battle is decided, "that couldn't be further from the truth," says Stoops, who will give **Texas Tech transfer Baker Mayfield** (the Big 12 Offensive Freshman of the Year in 2013) a chance to unseat junior Trevor Knight (179-of-316 passing for 2,300

Good idea. Mayfield turned that chance into 3,389 passing yards, 420 rushing yards and 42 total touchdowns.

▼▼▼

SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

After going 8-5 last year, OU can't afford to take anyone lightly. A **Sept. 12 game at rising Tennessee** should tell Bob Stoops a lot about whether his new offense is working, and don't be surprised if Texas pulls an upset on Oct. 10 in Dallas. The toughest stretch is mid-November, when the Sooners face Baylor (away), TCU (home) and Oklahoma State (away) with no bye.

other effective run-stoppers in junior Dominique Alexander (107 tackles) and redshirt senior Frank Shannon (92 tackles in 2013, suspended for '14 for sexual misconduct). The **problem lies with the secondary**, which gave up 276.2 passing yards per game last season, most in school history. □

Hmmm, maybe not. The Sooners allowed 201.5 passing yards per game, fewest in the Big 12.

yards, 14 touchdowns and 12 interceptions) in fall camp.

While Stoops has defended his program after a disappointing 8-5 season, he made eight changes to his staff, highlighted by **the hiring of East Carolina offensive coordinator Lincoln Riley**. Though he's an Air Raid disciple, Riley won't give up on the ground game—not with 5'11", 237-pound sophomore **Samaje Perine**, who last year set an FBS record with 427 rushing yards against Kansas.

After switching to a 3-4 defense in 2013, the Sooners will incorporate more 4-3 this year to cater to senior linebacker Eric Striker's strengths. They have

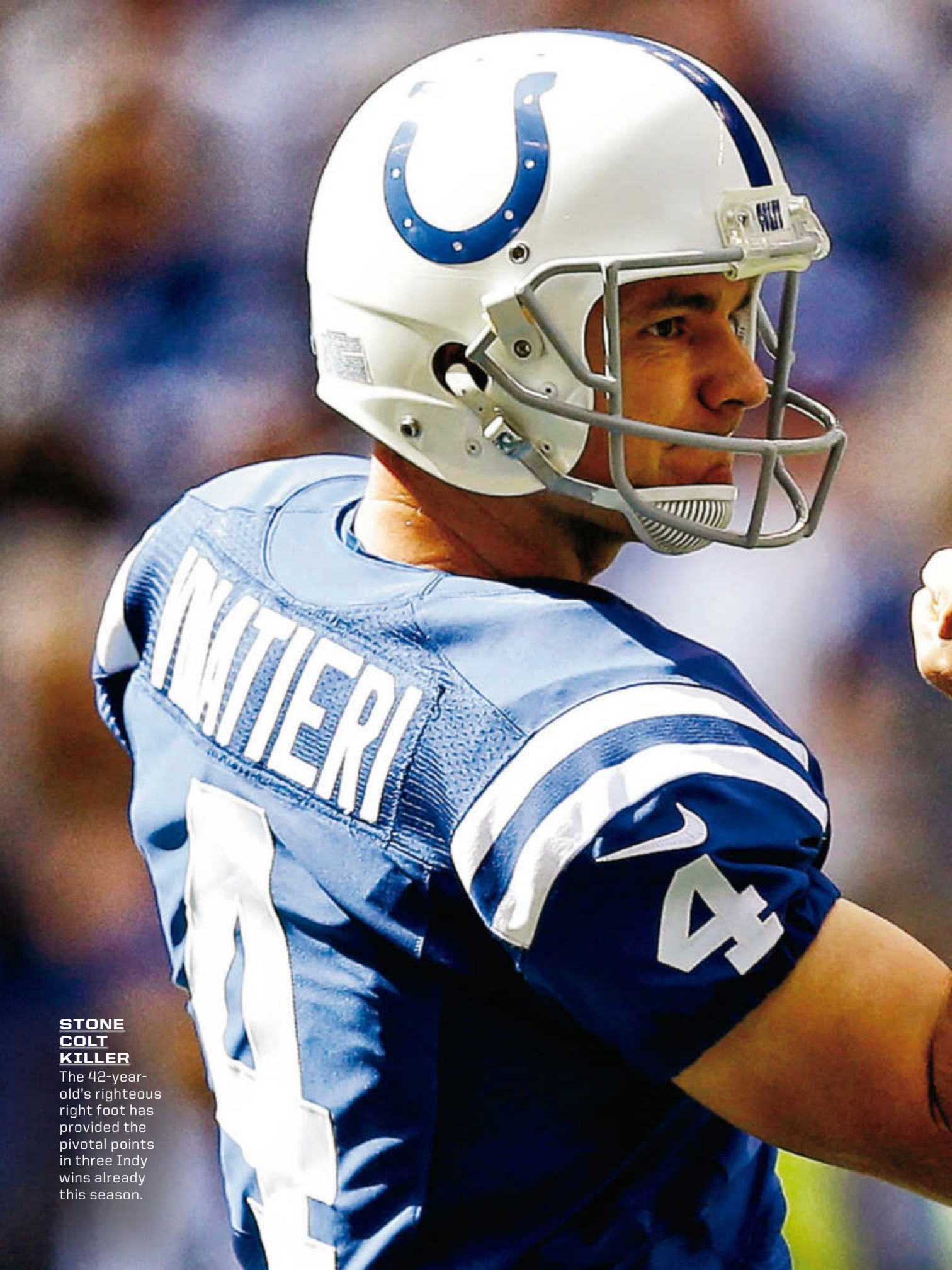


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X-FACTOR

After being suspended for his freshman season because of a misdemeanor assault charge (he took a plea bargain), **running back Joe Mixon** (6'2", 217 pounds) will have an instant impact. Mixon hasn't played in a real game since 2013 at Freedom High in Oakley, Calif., when he ran for 1,704 yards and 23 touchdowns. A gifted receiver, he's an ideal fit for the Sooners' new pass-heavy offense.

749 yards rushing, 345 receiving, 11 TDs. He was a double x-factor.



**STONE
COLT
KILLER**

The 42-year-old's righteous right foot has provided the pivotal points in three Indy wins already this season.



NFL +



FOSSIL FUELED

*ON A COLTS TEAM
WHOSE PLAYOFF
HOPES COULD HINGE
ON A SINGLE GAME,
PERHAPS EVEN A
SINGLE POINT, THE
MOST IMPORTANT
PLAYER JUST MAY
BE THE LEAGUE'S
OLDEST (AND ITS
CLUTCHEST): KICKER
ADAM VINATIERI*

BY JACK DICKEY

Photographs by
Michael Conroy/AP



YOU WOULD be forgiven for thinking that football is an old man's game. Tom Brady, the league's best quarterback, is 38, and the best running back, Adrian Peterson, is an ancient-by-that-gig's-standards

30. Those two are joined in 30-and-up triumph by, among others, Carson Palmer, Philip Rivers, Larry Fitzgerald and Brandon Marshall. Colts QB Matt Hasselbeck, 40, won his first four starts in place of injured wunderkind Andrew Luck, who's 26.

The sport at its highest level takes years to master, but the median player is a hair over 26, and the average career spans less than seven years, according to the NFL. Just when you learn to play the game, you're drummed out of it. There are countless players who would have joined the aforementioned group if not for frizzled ligaments, broken bones or just plain getting old.

Old, old, old. Adam Vinatieri is so old. . . . *How old is he?* The Colts' kicker is so old that the offensive and defensive rookies of the year in his debut season played their last NFL games in 2004 and '07, respectively. He's so old that the kicker whose job he took in his first training camp turns 60 next July. He's so old that he played against Reggie White in Super Bowl XXXI, XIX years ago. He's so old that he once tackled Herschel Walker. He's so old that, as punter Pat McAfee said in November, "the guy is wearing Depends, and he's knocking down game-winners every week."

Vinatieri turns 43 on Dec. 28, which makes him the oldest player in the NFL, a title he's held since kicker Jason Hanson retired in 2012. In '15, Vinatieri has made 89.5% of his field goals (including three of four beyond 50)—a higher success rate than in 15 of his previous 19 seasons. In other words, he's still kicking.

This would have been a remarkable feat a decade ago, but it's far more impressive when you consider today's competition. In 2015 kickers across the league have a hit rate of 84.8%. Compare that with 1995, one year before Vinatieri broke in, when kickers

hit just 77.4% of field goal attempts. A seemingly endless supply of strong-legged, dream-chasing soccer converts waits for every well-paid veteran to falter, and Vinatieri has held them all off. The kicker who competed against him in training camp last season, rookie Cody Parkey, wound up making the Pro Bowl after a trade to the Eagles. For his part, Vinatieri made the Pro Bowl too, on the strength of the league's most accurate season: 96.8%.

One year later Vinatieri is the wisest, oldest veteran on the league's oldest team. Indy, the island of well-worn misfit toys, this off-season alone added Andre Johnson (34), Trent Cole (33) and Frank Gore (32). Johnson is on pace for his worst season ever; Cole is trending for a career-low sack total; and Gore, coach Chuck Pagano says, "is beat to crap." And yet: Experience may be what it'll take to win the underwhelming AFC South.

OVER THE last two decades Vinatieri has had perhaps the most illuminating perch from which to witness the transformation of the NFL. He's played for Dungy, Belichick, Carroll and Parcells (who, he says, "made you nervous"). He's suited up alongside Brady, Manning and Luck.

On Brady versus Manning he says: "Brady's like a kid that, on the playground, just does his thing. And he's just good. Manning is the guy who's meticulous, almost OCD; I've never seen a guy prepare, study that hard. S---, he might as well be the coordinator, the GM and the coach. He may be the smartest player I've ever seen." As for Luck, Vinatieri says the QB's been a star since he started, knew the playbook from Day One, but . . . "he needs to have a little more a----- in him." And Vinatieri grimaces every time Luck takes a hit. "I'm thinking, No! Don't take those hits."

He wishes he remembered more. Two nights before the Patriots played the AFC championship game in Pittsburgh in 2002, Vinatieri was reminiscing with the key figures on what was about to become the NFL's next dynasty: Willie McGinest, Ty Law, Tedy Bruschi, maybe Brady—he's a little foggy on who was there. "Those are the fun times," he says, "sitting around with your buddies, talking about crazy s--- that happened back in the day. No drinking, just sitting around a table, talking. It was awesome."

Here he points to a reporter's tape recorder. "Thinking back, that's always when I'm like, 'Damn—I wish I had one of these.'"

LIKE SO many other kickers, Vinatieri has a career born from contingency. At Rapid City (S.D.) Central High he kicked, yes, but he also played QB and lettered in soccer, wrestling and track. "If I could have picked, I would have been 6' 4" and able to throw," he says, "but I knew kicking was my only shot." Maxed out at six feet, he landed at South Dakota State, and even that was a fallback plan.

In high school Vinatieri had applied to Army and Air Force, in large part because he'd enjoyed *Top Gun*. Three weeks at West Point was enough time away from home, though, and when he left, only SDSU—two hours from his hometown in Yankton—still had a roster spot for him. There he set the Jackrabbits' all-time scoring record and won two D-II championships, but SDSU

THESE BOOTS

They're made for winning, from New England (where Vinatieri beat the Rams) to Indy (where he's already the Colts' No. 1 all-time scorer).

Consider Vinatieri's vantage point: He's played for Dungy, Belichick, Carroll and Parcells; he's suited up alongside Brady, Manning and Luck.



isn't exactly known for shipping talent to the pros. So in 1995, after his graduation, Vinatieri—having completed premed courses, figuring that cardiac surgery was a good enough fallback if pro football didn't work out—landed on the Amsterdam Admirals in the World League of American Football.

The Patriots signed him after that spring season to compete in camp for the job of kickoff specialist. As Vinatieri remembers it, neither incumbent placekicker Matt Bahr nor punter Tom Tupa could kick off. Before New England's third preseason game, Parcells told Vinatieri he would handle not just kickoffs that night but also field goals. "He said, 'Let's see if you've got what it takes—or you're going to pack up your s--- and go home.'" Vinatieri made all three of his field goals and

all three of his extra points, and it was Bahr (a 17-year veteran beloved by Parcells) who had to pack up his s--- and go home.

Vinatieri has always had a strong right leg, and age has hardly weakened it. But he says what distinguishes him is his ability to clear his head under pressure: "There are more talented kickers. But the thing I do fairly well is that I can focus in."

Rare is the kicker who's remembered for anything other than his mistakes. But Vinatieri belongs to the class of athletes popularly endowed with the gene called "clutch." Although he never did get around to enrolling in medical school, he's probably the Pro Bowl kicker you'd trust most with a scalpel.

There was his kick for the Pats in the Tuck Rule game against



the Raiders in January 2002: After Brady's apparent fumble became an incompletion, Vinatieri still had to hit a 45-yarder in the last minute of regulation to tie things up. For that boot, on account of snow that he figured would keep Oakland's line from getting a good push, he aimed lower than usual. "I kick it, and it's like a frickin' 2-iron—15 feet off the ground. Once it cleared the line, it took forever. I could barely see the referees or the ball." The kick was good, and Vinatieri hit another to win it in overtime.

Two weeks later, in Super Bowl XXXVI, Vinatieri had to make one from three yards farther out (and with the fourth-quarter clock expiring) in order for his two-TD-underdog Patriots to upend the Rams. "As loud as it was, it felt quiet in my head, like in the movies," recalls Vinatieri. "When it left my foot, I was like, 'Oh, that felt perfect.' I think I was doing this"—Vinatieri raises his arms high above his head—"before it even hit the net."

Better to be lucky than good, it's often said, and as sports aphorisms go, it's among the easiest to defend. In the NFL in particular, volatility makes legends out of career afterthoughts. But it works just as well outside of football. Consider: During the Great Sioux War of 1876, General George Custer ordered his Seventh Cavalry to attack Indian encampments near the Little Bighorn River in Montana. These were highly decorated Civil War veterans, and they were, as we now know, set up to be slaughtered. Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse and their charges killed nearly half of the Seventh Cavalry, including Custer and two of his brothers.

Where does luck come in? Custer instructed his cavalry's band not to fight alongside him that day, leaving them instead on the supply steamboat, away from the skirmish. The band, made up primarily of European immigrants, all survived the military blunder, and their Italian leader, a Yankton settler, was discharged from service later that year. He would go on to write some of the earliest operas from the American West. His name? Felix Vinatieri.

Felix's great-great-grandson chose a line of work in which plenty of good careers have lacked luck. Adam cites Hanson, for one, who kicked for the Lions from 1992 through 2012. "He is

really good—I mean, *really* good," says a man who should know, who's clocked in more times (302 games to date) than any active player. "But he only played in a handful of playoff games. *Sheesh*. What if he'd played on a different type of team? I've been lucky."

The two franchises Vinatieri has played for? They've only been the league's winningest (Patriots) and fifth winningest (Colts) during his career. Vinatieri has seen more playoff games than any player ever. More luck: After his third season, the Browns (the losingest team in that stretch) offered him a contract. Mercifully, New England matched it. Three years later, after his kick won Super Bowl XXXVI, with suitors elsewhere, the Patriots slapped their franchise tag on the kicker. He grumbled before signing a longer deal and winning two more titles with the Pats. "What if I'd gone to Cleveland for 15 years? Maybe [New England] handcuffed me a little bit, but it worked out O.K."

When finally he decided to skip town in the spring of 2006, he managed to get a strong offer from a Colts team that *just couldn't* get past New England in the playoffs. With Vinatieri, Indy immediately won the Super Bowl, but not before their new kicker scored every point in a 15–6 division-round win over the Ravens and then provided the decisive field goals (3 for 3) in a 38–34 AFC championship game win over his old team.

Eight years later, another AFC title game elevated the Colts-Pats rivalry: After New England blew out Indy 45–7 last January came Deflategate, the winners tarred in the press as cheaters, the losers as tattletales. "I tried to stay away from all that," says Vinatieri, who turned down TV requests as the scandal erupted. He doesn't wish the Patriots any harm. "I still give Mr. Kraft a hug every time I see him; he was like a father to me."

And what of Spygate, which clouded the early title runs? "A lot of people were talking—*Do they really deserve these wins? Do they deserve blah, blah, blah?* S---, man. Look at all these players and their blood, sweat and tears, all the hard work we put in. I know exactly what we sacrificed. It made me mad."

WHAT'S LEFT for Vinatieri? He's stopped thinking beyond the now, owing to the unpredictability in his recovery time. He says, "I don't feel like I've lost a lot of strength—but I can't kick every day anymore. And I'm in the training room all the time."

He's at the mercy of his own body. But he's not especially eager to do anything else. He enjoys the outdoors—Vinatieri has hunted big game everywhere from Africa to the Arctic Circle; he even spoke at a 2014 event during the NRA's annual meetings—and spending time with his wife, Valerie, and their three children. He figures he's insufficiently edgy for the job of TV analyst.

So he'll keep chasing the fifth ring, which would tie him with Charles Haley for the most won as a player, until he can't anymore. "If [we win it all] this year—shoot, would I be gone?" he asks. "I'm not making any predictions. But it would be fun to win another one, that's for damn sure." And the old man is going to make certain, this time, that he documents every second of it. That, too, is for damn sure. □

A photograph of Becky Hammon, a basketball coach, kneeling on a wooden court and talking to players. She is wearing a black San Antonio Spurs polo shirt. Several players in grey San Antonio Spurs practice jerseys are visible around her. The background shows a basketball court with wooden flooring.

PONYTAIL EXP

*Before her pioneering role as an NBA assistant, **BECKY HAMMON** was an overlooked recruit in South Dakota and an underestimated point guard in the WNBA. Nothing has come easy for her, and she wouldn't have it any other way*



A GOOD LOOK

By going back to the drawing board for a last-minute play last summer in Las Vegas, Hammon gained respect from her coaching peers and from the Spurs.

BY ALEXANDER WOLFF

Photograph by
David Dow/NBAE/Getty Images



ONE MOMENT in one game in a risk-taker's city is all it took for Becky Hammon to transform herself from feminist novelist into an NBA head-coach-in-waiting.

The city was Las Vegas. The game, against the Knicks last July, was Hammon's first in charge of the Spurs' entry in the NBA's premier summer league. And the moment—with possession, down three, 23 seconds to play—tested San Antonio coach Gregg Popovich's decision 11 months earlier to make Hammon the first woman to serve as a salaried, full-time assistant for a major pro sports team.

The Las Vegas Summer League is a cross between cattle call and last-chance saloon, with all the Wild West untidiness those analogies suggest. A coach's first challenge is to keep a player from turning every scarce moment with the ball into an advertisement for himself. “She reminded us to just bring those Spurs habits to Vegas, to play D and play with one another,” recalls forward Kyle Anderson, the sole holdover from the franchise's wintertime A team. “And—one thing that's big in San Antonio—she did a great job coaching out of timeouts.”

So it was that Hammon drew up a play, then watched with alarm as Anderson and an assortment

of rookies and free agents minced through their first steps. “I could see that they weren’t quite sure what to do,” she says. “I probably didn’t explain it well enough.” Eight seconds later, she called another timeout.

Hammon reiterated what she wanted—“a punch play,” where the ball goes into the post and out again, followed by a “misdirect flare screen.” That’s when it finally presented itself, what’s known in the trade as a good look. . . .

WHERE HAMMON is involved, the smooth path seldom presents itself. Or, as she once put it in a blog post, “a rose has to push through some fertilizer (or another word for fertilizer, lol) to get to the sunlight to blossom.” As a senior at Stevens High in Rapid City, S.D., she found most Division I schools turned off by her 5' 6" frame and backwater pedigree. “Average white girl,” thought Tom Collen, then an Arkansas assistant. Several years later Collen found himself the coach at Colorado State, where Hammon was already well on her way to scoring 2,740 points, more than any WAC player, male or female. She led a program that had never reached the Top 25 to the Sweet 16, sextupling attendance in the process.

But she had the bad timing to leave Fort Collins right after the demise of the American Basketball League, which flooded the market with experienced talent in 1999. So Hammon took a free-agent flier as one of 20 invitees at the training camp of the New York Liberty, who already had four veteran guards. Two of them, co-captains Teresa Witherspoon and Vickie Johnson, pleaded with management, as one of them put it, to “keep that little white girl who keeps getting up when we knock her down.” The Liberty did, and soon Hammon began to trace a steady path: from spot duty off the bench as a rookie, to double-figure points in her second season, to team leader in scoring and shooting percentage in her fifth—before tearing her right ACL. “I’ve had 17 NBA All-Stars, and nobody drove and finished better than Becky Hammon,” says her coach for six summers in New York, Richie Adubato. “Michael or Kobe or [Derrick] Rose could elevate and slither, but Becky is 5' 6" and only jumps an inch. When she drove you couldn’t see her in the crowd in the lane—just the ball coming out of there and into the basket.”

In April 2007, just after turning 30 and suffering a bad left-ankle sprain, the Liberty traded her to San Antonio. There she logged eight more seasons with the Stars and, in 2011, was named one of the top 15 WNBA players of all time. Throughout her career she supplemented meager WNBA wages by playing winters in Italy, Spain, Israel and Russia—a country that crops up in her story again and again.

In 2007, Hammon completed her finest WNBA season to date, finishing second in the MVP voting, the highest among American players. But she wasn’t included in the initial U.S. player pool for the 2008 Beijing Games, and though she was eventually invited to try out, her agent confirmed with USA Basketball that she wasn’t in serious contention to make the team. So to fulfill a childhood dream of playing in the Olympics, she chose to become a Russian citizen. “She didn’t say no to USA Basketball,” says Chicago Sky coach Pokey Chatman, who coached her at Spartak Moscow Region. “They didn’t say yes to *her*. But I don’t think she ever came out and put it that way.”

The U.S. coach, Anne Donovan, called Hammon’s decision “not patriotic.” Yet Hammon regards it as an inflection point in her life. “I know I can take a lot of crap when I follow my heart,” she says. “To that point I represented the very all-American girl next door, with the ponytail from

“I KNOW I CAN TAKE A LOT OF CRAP WHEN I FOLLOW MY HEART,” HAMMON SAYS OF HER DECISION TO PLAY FOR RUSSIA IN THE OLYMPICS. “I’M NOT AFRAID TO TAKE A RISK. AND I RISKED A LOT.”



SILVER LININGS

If Hammon hadn’t had to try out for the Liberty and been snubbed by Team USA, she might never have joined the Spurs as an assistant.



the Midwest. But that proved I’m not afraid to take a risk. And I risked a lot. My reputation—people said terrible things about me.”

But Hammon has a highly developed sense of the silver lining. If the play you call looks shaky, you take another TO to give it a better chance to work. As she says, “My journey had been divinely orchestrated, with one step leading to another.”

If she hadn’t grown up in South Dakota, where the basketball season then took place in the fall and recruiters gave it a miss, she wouldn’t have landed at a Rams program aching for leadership. If she hadn’t gone undrafted, she wouldn’t have been forced to refine the skills that made her a WNBA legend. If she hadn’t hurt her ankle, she wouldn’t have been traded to San Antonio and crossed paths with Popovich. If she hadn’t been snubbed by Team USA, she wouldn’t have become a basketball Russian, which synced up with the



academic interest of the Spurs' coach, a Soviet specialist at the Air Force Academy—which would have meant that, when the two found themselves seated next to each other on a flight back from the London Olympics in 2012, they might have been left with nothing to talk about but basketball. Of Hammon and basketball, Popovich already knew plenty; instead they covered just about everything else, which gave the famously worldly Pop his first nuanced sense of her.

Hammon's decision to play for Russia impressed him all on its own. "It was pretty brave, because you knew there'd be people of the ilk of 'That's unpatriotic or shortsighted,'" he says. "It's not about any of that. It's about being a competitor and living a life that lasts not very long, and taking advantage of all life's opportunities without hurting anybody else. She seizes the day."

That the two happened to be in the same row on the same flight—that was just happenstance, right? "I don't think that anything," Hammon says, "is happenstance."

RAPID CITY was founded one night in 1876 when 11 men around a campfire took honest stock of their lot. Their dreams of finding gold on what is now the western fringe of South Dakota had come to nothing. So they raffled off 11 plots of land among themselves, pledging to "lay out a Denver" for the Black Hills. It was a better bet after a lesser one failed to pay off, but a risky one just the same.

Marty and Bev Hammon arrived from Minnesota a century later in the same prospecting spirit. With Marty assigned new territory as a regional sales rep for a fire sprinkler company, the family moved into a trailer park with daughter Gina, son Matt and infant Rebecca Lynn. Several years later the Hammons built a house with 30,000 acres of

the Black Hills National Forest spilling from its door. "Becky would be sitting on the stairs waiting for me to get home from work, and we'd go out and have an adventure," says Marty, who would take neighborhood kids along too. "I promised to never bring 'em back clean."

By the time she turned 12, Becky had learned to hunt pheasant and grouse and handle a shotgun—an heirloom Browning over-under 12-gauge. With Bev brushing the snarls from her hair after a day at what friends called Camp Marty, Becky picked up the nickname Beckaboo, which eventually morphed into Boo-Boo, then Bubba. On snowmobiles, three-wheelers and four-wheelers she crossed creeks and transited ravines, developing the fearlessness, sense of balance and what she calls "overall general alertness" that helped her thrive as a point guard.

During family trips to the Florida Keys, Becky would swim with manatees and dolphins and sometimes sharks, spearing fish for dinner. "If we were all camping, she'd tell us what to do," Popovich says. "She's one of the few women I know who could have survived pioneer days and lived off the land."

In 1993, when Becky was 16, Marty started his own fire sprinkler business. He took out a second mortgage. He paid the penalty for dipping into his IRA. For seven months he didn't see a paycheck. Matt Hammon and his siblings bought out his father three years ago, and Rapid Fire Protection, Inc., is now a \$24 million-a-year business with 170 employees. "My dad has a very fearless approach to life," Becky says. "He's smart but not afraid to take risks."

Throughout her childhood Marty had supplied his daughter with reality checks. He first disabused her of dreams of dunking. Then he explained why she'd never play in the NBA.

"I didn't," he says, "say anything about coaching."

HAMMON'S TEAR of her left ACL, in July 2013, couldn't have been better timed. It came shortly before the Spurs assembled for training camp and led Popovich to offer her unlimited access to the team's inner sanctum. "Because I respected her so much, when she got hurt I thought, This young lady can't just sit around all year," he says. "I wanted to see what else was there."

At Colorado State she had been an exercise and sport science major with a concentration in teaching and a coaching minor. Breaking in as a WNBA benchwarmer, Hammon got her first look at pro ball as a coach

sees it, learning to assess how a game's rhythm and flow might be altered or exploited. She was already friendly with her Spurs counterpart at point guard, Tony Parker. "She knows when to speak and knows when to shut up," Popovich has said of Hammon, a description that reminds former teammate Rebecca Lobo of the player who had the ability to connect in any corner of the Liberty locker room: "In a coaching situation, just like in a social situation, she knows how to fit in."

Popovich liked another thing about her. "It was just a kick to watch her play, chewing her gum and directing traffic," he says. "She exuded leadership on the court, and players reacted to that. R.C. [Buford, the Spurs' general manager] and I never gave it a second thought. We just did it."

Her hiring became official after that year's apprenticeship and her final WNBA season the following summer. NBA rules mandate that she sit behind the bench because she's not one of Popovich's top three assistants. But there's no duty her boss doesn't trust her with, whether preparing a scouting report or putting a player through an individual workout. She blends seamlessly into the practice-court tableau, except for the occasional splash of color in a headband that pops from the ambient silver and black. "At the beginning I was concerned," Ettore Messina, Popovich's lead assistant, says. "How can we joke? How can we curse? But she's perfectly *there*, and not because she wants to act like a man. She's a woman with a touch of class. In Italian we have the word *femminilità*, meaning the class of a woman. She has that, even in a men's environment."

Hammon credits the WNBA with professionalizing her through the rigor of weight work and film study. The league also helped her earn respect from NBA players, notwithstanding what she calls "the Joe Schmoes" who might still deride the league. "LeBron James and Chris Paul, they watch it and enjoy it," she says. "Especially the young guys, many of them watched me play. But the biggest was Pop. He and R.C. saw me run a thousand pick-and-rolls. A pick-and-roll is a pick-and-roll no matter who's running it."

"Character is genderless. Leadership is genderless. If you're a great leader, you're a great leader. Patience, service, the ability to listen—either you have it or you don't."

Months after that Las Vegas fortnight, Anderson can still hear Hammon telling him not to "get too cute out there." That sound, he says, "is the voice of authority. I hear it regardless."

Hammon could have any women's coaching job she wants right now, WNBA or major college, but she's in the second year of a two-year deal with San Antonio. "I'm in a great learning space, and this year I'm so much more comfortable," she says. "Then, we'll see."

THAT SHOT Hammon engineered at the end of her first game in Las Vegas, a three-pointer from the corner, failed to go in. Afterward she received a consolatory text from her former Stars coach Dan Hughes: *You did what great coaches do. You gave your players a chance to win.* That didn't keep her from revisiting her mistakes through a sleepless night. But over the rest of the competition the Spurs won six straight, including four by five points or fewer, even coming back from 15 down in the second half to beat the Hawks in the semifinals. After they tripped the Suns 93–90 for the title, Hammon's players made the ultimate gesture of acceptance, giving her a Gatorade dousing—although with no cooler handy, the shower came in the form of a dozen players emptying a dozen bottles. It was a Ham-

***"IT WAS JUST A KICK
TO WATCH HER
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TO THAT."***



COUNTERPOINTS

The friendship between Parker and Hammon dates back to her playing days in San Antonio, and it has her fitting in seamlessly with the Spurs.



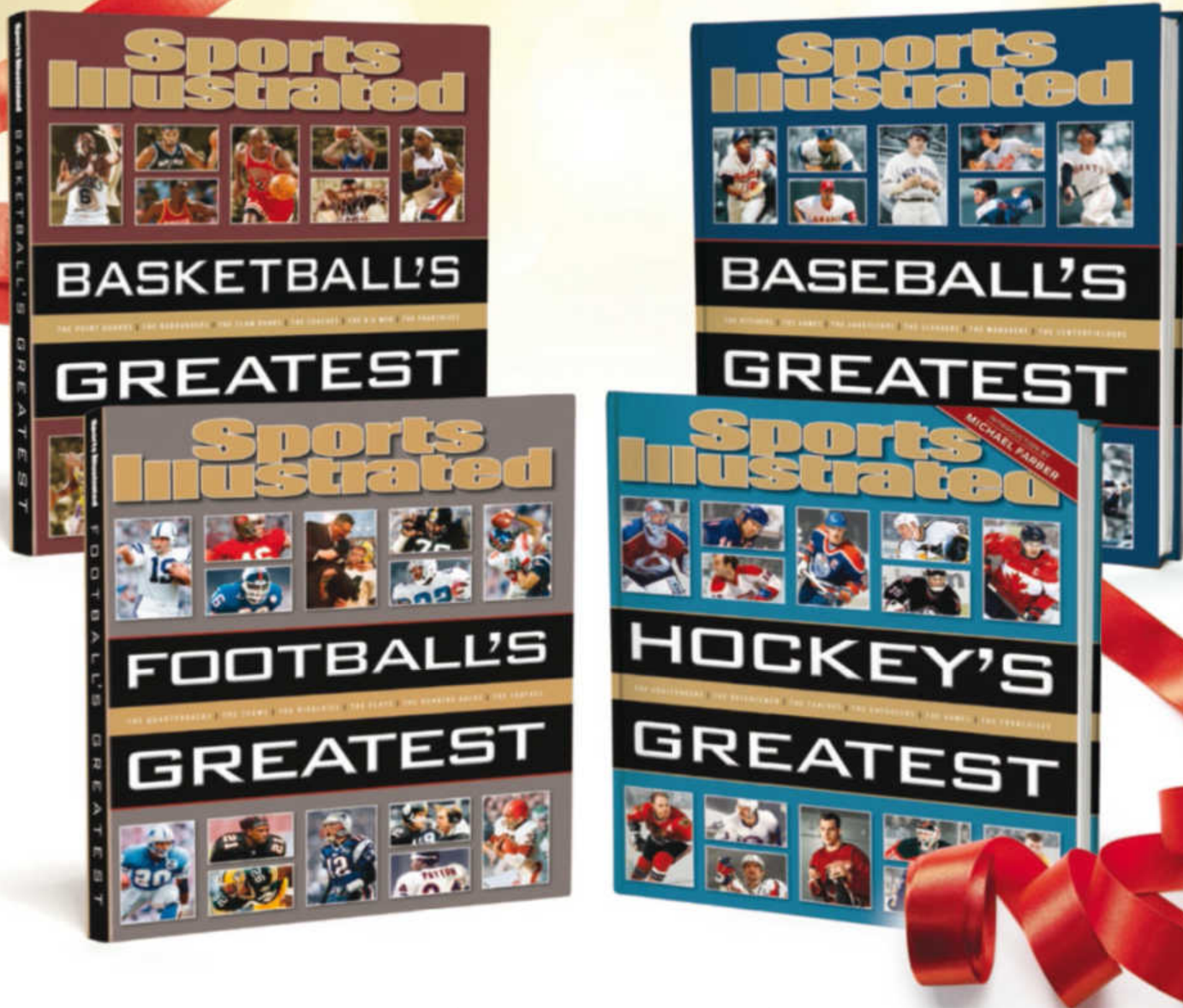
monesque moment, making the best of the situation.

Popovich cites the hug that Anderson, the summer league's MVP, fixed her with after the final. "That was heartfelt and genuine and told me a lot," he says. "That's the new generation. Kyle is 21 or 22, and not too cool to do that."

Months later, the day after being named coach of the U.S. men's team for the four-year cycle following next year's Rio Olympics, Popovich sat in his office at San Antonio's AT&T Center and fielded a question: Might there be a place on his U.S. staff for the former point guard of Russia's women's team?

Popovich stiffened as if he had just spotted a Craig Sager sport coat at 10 paces. He began ticking off politic disclaimers. And then he permitted himself a smile. Perhaps he suddenly realized that he might not want to transit the badlands of international basketball without his own Laura Ingalls Wilder. "It is," he said, "a pretty cool thought." □

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THE COACH had a story to share. This was August 2011, on the eve of Ed Cooley's first season as coach at Providence and Kris Dunn's senior season at New London (Conn.) High, and this meeting, in Cooley's new first-floor office, was the pair's first sit-down conversation. They had first seen each other more than a year earlier, when Cooley was an ambitious coach at Fairfield scouting a scrawny reserve AAU point guard whom teammates called Peanut. Most coaches haunting those Connecticut Basketball Club games were there to court Andre Drummond, Dunn's 6' 11" teammate and current Pistons MVP candidate, but Cooley was taken by the littler man's coltish motor and telepathic anticipation. After being announced as the Friars' new coach the following March, he called Dunn to tell him, "You're the only dude in America I want."

Now Cooley told Dunn about himself. About his childhood in South Providence. How he lacked a father figure for years until meeting his biological dad when he was a boy. About the empty refrigerator, the corn flakes with water as a substitute for milk, the desperate measures his siblings undertook to scrounge up money. He told him about how sports had saved his life and how the hunger that ruled his early years was still the engine powering him today.

If he got here, thought Dunn, I wonder what he can do with me.

In the four years since that meeting, Cooley has helped Dunn grow into the Big East's reigning overall and defensive player of the year, a two-way terror whose stat-sheet-stuffing excellence has helped the Friars surge to a Top 25 ranking. At week's end the 6' 4" Dunn ranks second nationally in steal percentage (6.3%), second in the Big East in scoring (18.2 points) and first in assists (7.3) and steals (3.6). Already this season he has told a Friars coach he was due for a triple double and then followed through the next night (vs. Hartford on Dec. 2), flirted with a quadruple double (22 points, 10 boards, nine assists and seven steals against NJIT on Nov. 23) and hit the opening month's most Vine-worthy game-winner, a stop-on-a-dime turnaround jumper from the right block in the Friars' upset of then No. 11 Arizona on Nov. 27. After that game, in which Dunn scored or assisted on Providence's final 15 points, Wildcats coach Sean Miller declared the point guard to be "out-of-this-world good." Two days later Chris Paul sat courtside at the Honda Center for the Friars' loss to No. 3 Michigan State, then sought Dunn out after the game to laud his defense and joke that he dreaded Dunn's arrival in the NBA.



DARKNESS UNTO LIGHT

*Providence's **KRIS DUNN** is the nation's best point guard, but you know that. But do you know the haunting path the junior player of the year candidate took to get here?*

BY DAN GREENE

Photograph by
Heinz Kluetmeier for Sports Illustrated

GOD IS WATCHING

The last Friars recruit this divine was God Shammgod, now a mentor to Dunn, whose game belongs on an even higher plane, perhaps that of an NBA lottery pick.





After Dunn hit the opening month's most Vine-worthy jumper to upset No. 11 Arizona, Wildcats coach Sean Miller declared the point guard to be
"OUT-OF-THIS-WORLD GOOD."

"Spider-Man" is how Cooley describes his star, pressing two fingers to each palm to mimic superhero web spraying. "He's everywhere." That includes every early-season national player of the year short list. It's a long way from when he was a backup called Peanut and, as with his coach, even further from the darkness that preceded.

MOM WAS gone again. By the summer of 2003, Pia James's two sons, John and Kris, had grown used to her absences, a string of jail stints, usually no more than a few days at a time, for offenses ranging from credit-card fraud to driving while intoxicated. They largely cared for themselves in the family's two-bedroom apartment in Alexandria, Va., with John, 13, waking and getting Kris, 9, ready for school and heating Hot Pockets for dinner. But when one absence dragged on longer than the previous ones, John realized that this time might be different. He told Kris that the two of them were now truly on their own.

For five months the brothers told no one, fearing possible separation in foster care. They stopped going to school, ignoring all knocks on the door. They sold their Air Jordan sneakers and Sean John jeans at a discount. John used trick dice to win games of craps and 7-11 in a nearby park. Kris played older boys one-on-one at a basketball court for \$20, even when he had no money of his own to back up the bet. At night he fought teenage drug dealers and shook them down for cash.

"It was literally hell," Kris says of this period. "There probably wasn't one day we smiled."

Some 350 miles northeast the boys' father wondered where they were. Eight years earlier John Seldon had come home from work to find James had packed up and left their New London home with John and Kris in tow. In the years following her disappearance, he tried in vain to locate his family. Subpoenas were sent to James's mother's house, but lawyers were unable to find her. Then, in the summer of 2004, Seldon got a call from James. She told Seldon she would send their elder son to Connecticut for five days but would not disclose where he was living, going so far as to have the boy return via a flight to North Carolina.

About a month after his son left, Seldon sifted through his phone bill, finding a series of calls to Virginia numbers. He began dialing, asking strangers if they knew where his sons were. Finally a young girl told him where he could find them, and that James was incarcerated.

Seldon visited a Connecticut court to confirm that he could assume custody of his sons. He called a friend at 2:30 a.m. to join him in his 2003 Chevy Venture for a lead-footed, nonstop, six-hour drive down I-95. When they got to the Alexandria address the girl had given them—Dunn's aunt's house—a rail-thin boy answered the door wielding a hot-sauce bottle, barking at the two men to back up. John walked into the room to calm



HEROIC FEET

His coach calls him Spider-Man, as Dunn's acrobatic moves make him one of the country's most versatile guards.

his brother. "That's our dad," he said. Kris set aside the bottle and began to cry.

IN CONNECTICUT, Kris and John were reluctant to warm to their new family—their father; his wife, Audra; his 10-year-old stepson, Rashad; and the Seldons' two infant daughters. Kris bristled at the house rules,

staying out past dark and steering the lawn mower over rocks in defiance of assigned yard work. At school he fought classmates for their shoes or PlayStation Portables, dealing his spoils for cash that he hid in books or behind posters in his bedroom. "If you need something," Seldon tried to tell his son, "just ask me." That Christmas, when Kris unwrapped an iPod along with a blue Mongoose bike and a pair of Jordans, he thought his name had been written on the gifts by mistake.

Soon Kris and his father found common ground on the gridiron. Seldon had been a linebacker at Dodge City (Kans.) Community College, and Kris proved a prodigious youth-league running back and corner. As an eighth-grader he tagged along to workouts at New London High, where Seldon served as an assistant coach, and followed his father's guidance in the school's weight room five days a week. As Kris became more interested in basketball, Seldon researched Michael Jordan's workouts and took Kris



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KRIS DUNN

EVEN FOR Providence's most celebrated recruit since God Shammgod in the mid-'90s, Dunn's path to stardom hasn't been easy. His freshman season was slowed by recovery from off-season surgery to repair a torn labrum in his right shoulder; as a sophomore he played just four games before suffering a second injury to the same shoulder. A week later his mother, with whom he was hoping to reconnect, died in Virginia. Dunn spent the next month at home in New London regrouping. "He didn't come out of his room for almost three days," says Seldon. "I know he was in there crying. I know he was hurt. But what can you say to him?"

Dunn returned to the bench to cheer the Friars as they made a surprise run to the 2014 Big East tournament title, then spent last season as the type of game-changer Cooley had envisioned. As a long, do-it-all guard adept at handling the pick-and-roll on both ends, he was considered a likely NBA first-round draft pick if he declared. But Dunn saw holes in his game—a propensity for turnovers

(he is down from 4.2 per game last season to 3.0) and a jumper that needed fine-tuning. He was in no rush to turn basketball into a job. "Guys ain't [in the NBA] to laugh," says Dunn, whom one team executive compares to the Magic's Elfrid Payton. "Guys are there to win games and provide for their families."

This too remains Dunn's dream—to take care not only of the father and stepmother who swooped in to provide for him, but also the brother who did the same. (John, who is an accountant in Montville, Conn., is the father of a one-year-old daughter, Aubree.) Dunn has a chance to fulfill three predictions Cooley made during that meeting four years ago: that he would become an All-America, the national player of the year and an NBA lottery pick.

More immediately on Dunn's agenda is a return to the NCAA tournament, where the sixth-seeded Friars were upset by Dayton in Dunn's first March Madness game last spring. Even with a star as transcendent as Dunn and an 8-1 start, this is no guarantee. Dunn recalls the pain of his Virginia childhood every time he takes the court, and when he visualizes the course of this season, he sees opponents as still more obstacles. "You're in my way right now," says Dunn. "You're in my path." It has been a long one already, the lows never forgotten, more highs still to come. □

to scrimmage college kids at Central Connecticut. Seldon would follow his overnight shift as a poker room supervisor at Mohegan Sun by driving Kris to AAU tournaments, sneaking naps in the parking lot. When he was in the stands, he would lock eyes with Kris and flap his arms like wings, encouraging his son to fly around the court. *Don't let that motor stop*, he would say. *Keep fighting*. The hardened boy began to soften. "Once he got that attention," says Seldon, "he loved it."

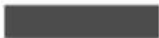
At New London High, Dunn started at point guard as a freshman, then led the Whalers to a state title game as a sophomore. An undefeated junior season followed, with Dunn winning the first of two consecutive *New Haven Register* state MVP awards. He earned a new nickname; Peanut was now Stretch, for how his defensive abilities reminded coaches of a character from the *Fantastic Four*. His McDonald's All-American Game selection was the first for a Connecticut player in nearly three decades, when Charles Smith was named to the team. "He was rock-star status," says New London coach Craig Parker. After one road game Parker had to usher his team out a back entrance to avoid the mob seeking Dunn's autograph.

After a growth spurt, from about 5' 7" to 6 feet, and a breakout performance during an AAU tournament in Little Rock in the summer after 11th grade, a court of college coaches began gathering as well. Suddenly Kentucky, Louisville, Florida and UConn all entered the picture, keeping the Seldons' phone ringing past midnight. Dunn narrowed his choices to the Huskies—in-state royalty and the defending national champs—and the Friars. But when he sat down with Cooley, who'd haunted his games for well more than a year, his mind was made up. "I needed somebody who's gonna keep me fighting in life and never forget my pain and struggle," Dunn says. "I knew he was gonna be that person."



DUDE PERFECT

Dunn found common ground with Cooley (left), who told him in high school, "You're the only dude in America I want."





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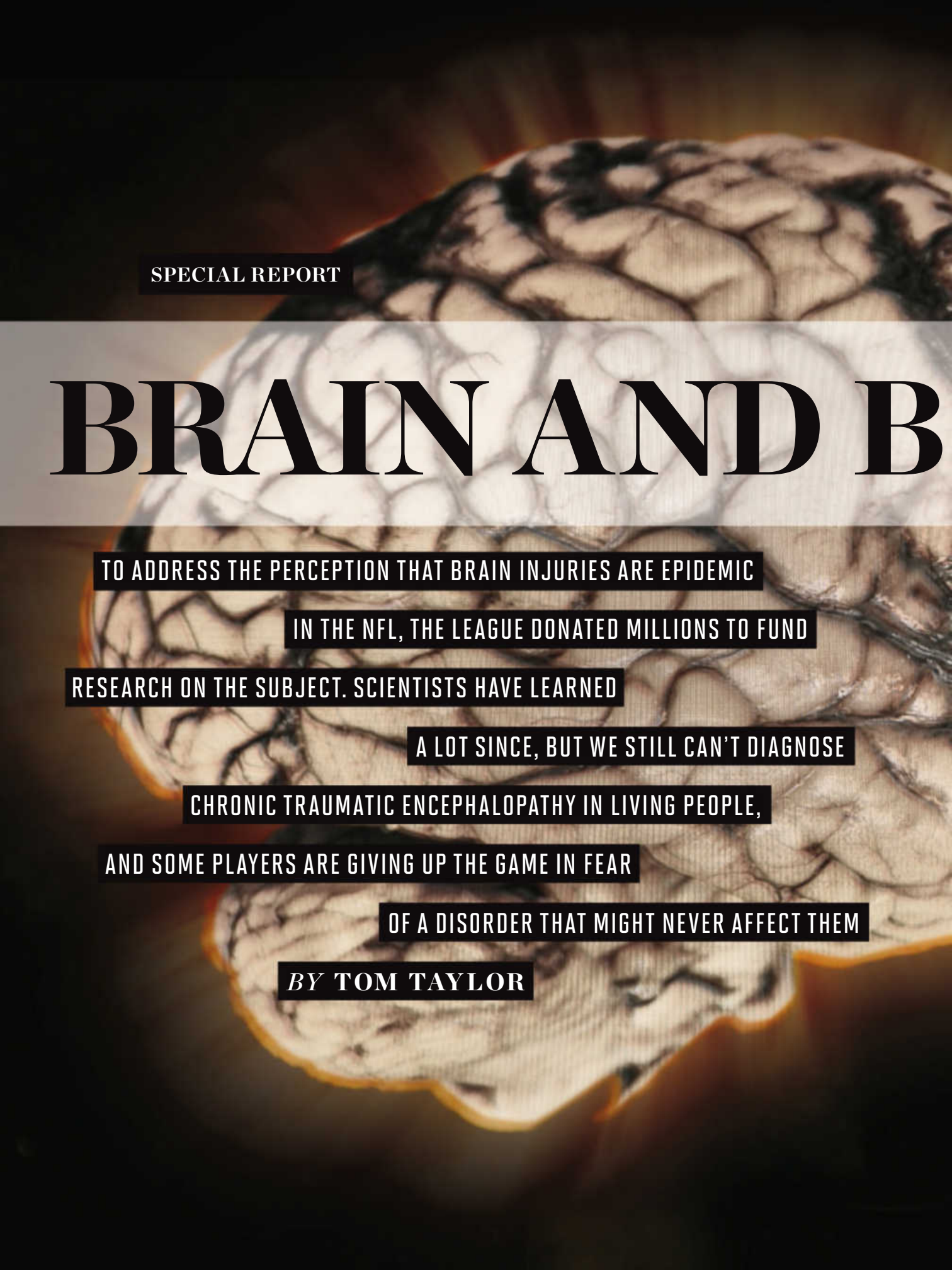
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SPECIAL REPORT

BRAIN AND B

TO ADDRESS THE PERCEPTION THAT BRAIN INJURIES ARE EPIDEMIC

IN THE NFL, THE LEAGUE DONATED MILLIONS TO FUND

RESEARCH ON THE SUBJECT. SCIENTISTS HAVE LEARNED

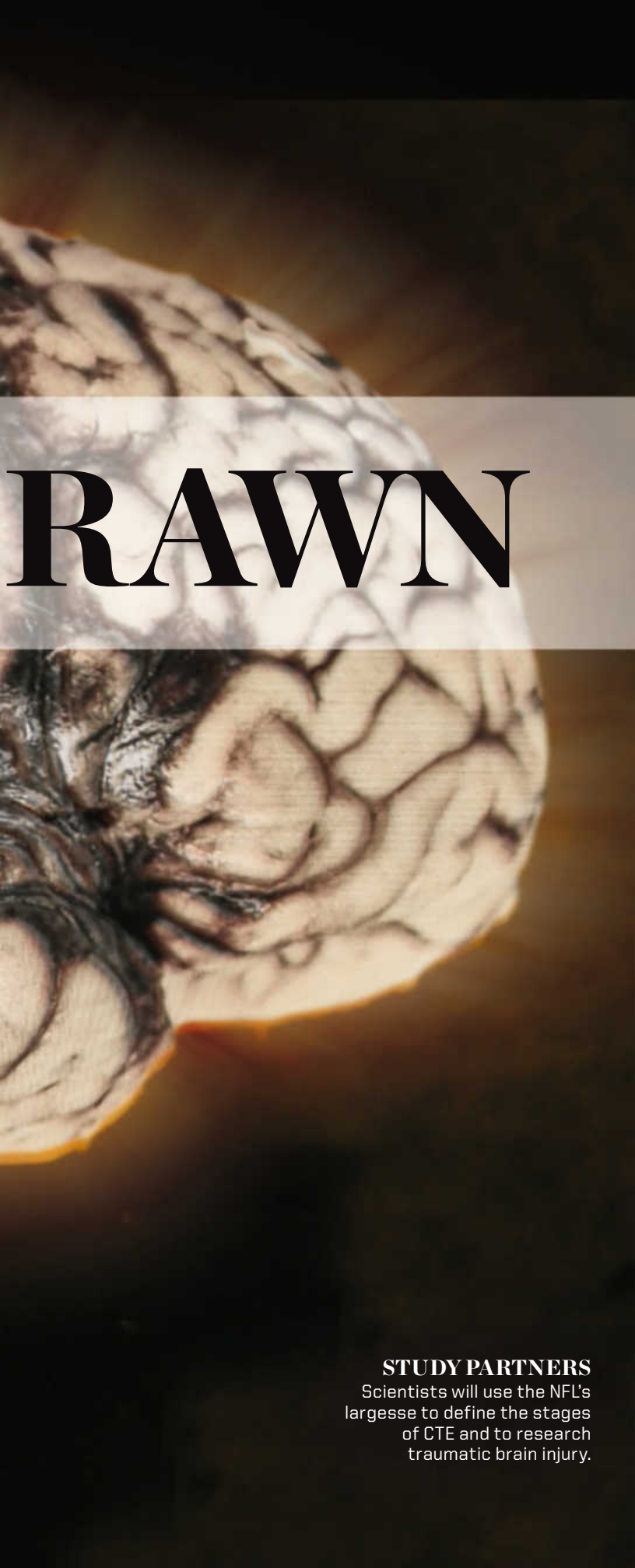
A LOT SINCE, BUT WE STILL CAN'T DIAGNOSE

CHRONIC TRAUMATIC ENCEPHALOPATHY IN LIVING PEOPLE,

AND SOME PLAYERS ARE GIVING UP THE GAME IN FEAR

OF A DISORDER THAT MIGHT NEVER AFFECT THEM

BY TOM TAYLOR



RAWN

STUDY PARTNERS

Scientists will use the NFL's largesse to define the stages of CTE and to research traumatic brain injury.

RICK FRIEDMAN FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED; PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY SI PREMEDIA

BY 2012, THE NFL had a brain problem. Five days before Super Bowl XLIII, in 2009, Boston University neuropathologist Ann McKee held a press conference across the street from Tampa's Raymond James Stadium to discuss chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE). Nine months later McKee testified at a congressional hearing, and in February 2010, TIME magazine did a cover story on football calling it "The Most Dangerous Game." Beginning in August 2011 more than 4,500 former players sued the NFL, accusing the league of hiding the dangers of concussions. In May 2012, Hall of Fame linebacker Junior Seau fatally shot himself, and an autopsy showed he had CTE.

The NFL settled the lawsuit for \$765 million in April 2015. That October, PBS aired *League of Denial*, a documentary based on the book of the same name by Steve Fainaru and Mark Fainaru-Wada, who detailed what they called the league's "concussion crisis." Across America parents were pulling their kids off the field, concerned that the children's brains and psyches would be permanently damaged. From 2010 to '12, participation in Pop Warner football dropped 9.5%.

Every day, it seemed, another retired player (or his family) came forward to discuss depression that the player attributed to years of absorbing blows to the head. CTE went from an obscure degenerative brain disease diagnosed posthumously in prizefighters to a household acronym that threatened the very existence of football. Never mind that no causal link had been demonstrated between CTE and depression. Or that researchers hadn't shown that playing football causes CTE. Players—and the public—became convinced that NFL veterans were destined to suffer debilitating depression or dementia.

In September 2012, NFL commissioner Roger Goodell announced that the league was donating \$30 million to the National Institutes of Health. It was the single largest donation the league had made in its 92-year history, and it was designed to support research on injuries affecting athletes, with a focus on brain trauma. The donation also offset some of the bad press the NFL was receiving about football's alleged toll on players' brains. The

SPECIAL REPORT

NIH would distribute the money; the NFL would have no say in where it went. In December 2013 the NIH announced that there would be two recipients of the NFL's largesse: The first group, led by McKee, was awarded \$6 million to define a set of criteria for the stages of CTE; the other team, led by Wayne Gordon, a professor of rehabilitation medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City, would also receive \$6 million to research traumatic brain injury (*page 80*).

If the NFL was trying to push CTE from the front page, the strategy appeared to have worked (with assistance from the NFL's mismanagement of domestic violence cases and Deflategate). Since 2010 participation in high school football has fallen by just 2.2%, according to the National Federation of State High School Associations. Over the same period, the NFL's annual revenue increased by more than 20%, to \$11.1 billion. Eight of the 10 top-rated TV broadcasts of 2012–13 were NFL games. Football's role in brain injury seems to have receded from public consciousness (at least until the release of the movie *Concussion* later this month).

Meanwhile research continues, in part thanks to NFL money. So what do we really know about CTE? Or concussions? Or, for that matter, how football or soccer or any other sport contributes to them?

JOSH PLESCE'S head still ached. On Sept. 18, 2013, the 16-year-old sophomore at John Champe High School in Aldie, Va., had gone to the ER with a suspected concussion after hitting his head on the ground during soccer practice. He missed the rest of that week of school, then gradually returned to classes. Earlier, in the spring, he'd been kicked in the head while playing goalie and was diagnosed with his first concussion. That time the pain had been sharper but had dissipated in three weeks.

A month after the second injury, though, Josh's pain lingered. Loud noises were excruciating; the alarm during a school fire drill set him back just when his headaches seemed to be subsiding. He couldn't focus in class, and he couldn't sleep. Maybe the time before hadn't really been a concussion, he thought. Maybe this is what a concussion is really like. Or perhaps this isn't a concussion at all.

Josh's parents, Angie and George, took him to his pediatrician, then to a concussion clinic in nearby Leesburg and finally to a neurologist. On the recommendation of Josh's pediatrician and school nurse, his diet was changed to low-carb and high-protein. He drank lots of water and got regular exercise and plenty of rest. Josh tried to hide how much he was suffering; he didn't want to worry his parents.

But when Josh got his midterm report card, his father confronted him. He was struggling in AP math and history. George worried that his formerly straight-A kid had become a lazy teenager. "You don't understand: I can't sleep at night," Josh said. "My head still hurts every day."

Josh stayed home more and more. He holed up in his bedroom, playing video games and trying to sleep. He stopped exercising, stopped hanging out with friends and rarely ate dinner with his family. One day in late January he had a panic attack as his mom was dropping him off at school. Angie took him home. "I locked myself in the bathroom and just sat there,"



CONCUSSION IS A TRAUMATIC BUT—IF TREATED CONDITION, WHILE CTE IS

Josh says. "I wanted to commit suicide. It was just never-ending pain."

Josh started seeing a psychiatrist and a neuropsychologist. He was prescribed a barbiturate (Phrenilin), antiseizure medication (Neurontin), an antidepressant (Cymbalta) and ADHD medication (Clonidine). At one point he was taking 15 pills a day, and when he didn't take them he got more headaches from withdrawal. He had Botox injections in his scalp and was prescribed opioid patches (Fentanyl) but quit using them because they made him throw up.

Nothing seemed to work, so Josh's neurologist suggested he get a PET-CT scan of his brain. The family's medical insurance would not cover the procedure, but Angie and George felt they had no other choice. They paid the \$1,500 cost of the scan. On March 28, 2014, a small amount of radioactive tracer was injected into Josh's arm, and a radiation detector created an image of where the tracer collected, showing the structure of his brain. A preprocedure report listed his history as "chronic encephalopathy, traumatic brain injury."

SIMON BRUTY FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED



BACK KICKING

After being told erroneously that he had CTE, Plesce was treated for a concussion and has returned to the soccer field.

CORRECTLY—RECOVERABLE

AN INCURABLE DEGENERATIVE DISEASE.

Four days later Angie, George and Josh sat in the neurologist's office. Josh can't remember anything from that meeting—he was in a daze much of the time—but his parents can. "It was the worst day of my life," George says. Angie broke down in tears. "I'm sorry to tell you," the doctor said, "your son has CTE."

It was a catastrophic diagnosis. Or would have been, had it been true.

HARRISON MARTLAND, a forensic pathologist and the chief medical examiner of Essex County, N.J., called CTE "punch drunk" when he first identified it in boxers during autopsies in 1928. *Dementia pugilistica*, linked almost exclusively with boxing throughout the 20th century, made the leap to football in 2002 when Bennet Omalu, a neuropathologist at the University of Pittsburgh, identified CTE in the brain of Steelers Hall of Fame center Mike Webster, who had died at age 50 and suffered from dementia. Omalu then found CTE in the brains of two more deceased Steelers, Justin Strzelczyk (who died in 2004) and Terry Long (2005).

Concussion is a traumatic but—if treated correctly—recoverable condition, while CTE is an incurable degenerative disease. When someone suffers head impact, the brain can shift and twist inside the skull. Shearing forces stretch the membranes of the nerve fibers (axons) that connect the nerve cells (neurons) and, through a process that is not fully understood, trigger an energy crisis: Blood flow, which delivers glucose, is restricted at precisely the same time as the neurons' demand for energy spikes. The brain responds by powering down functions in the affected area, causing the symptoms of concussion, which can last for weeks or longer.

Though CTE, like concussion, is associated with head trauma, its physiological changes are irreversible and develop over years. Similar to Alzheimer's disease, CTE is a tauopathy, characterized by the presence of deposits of a protein called tau throughout the brain. While this protein is present in healthy neurons—it forms the scaffolding of microtubules that run the length of axons—in tauopathies it clumps together. Over time these fibrous tangles spread throughout the brain. According to a review article in August by William Meehan III, director of the Micheli Center for Sports Injury Prevention in Waltham, Mass., in the journal *Neurology*, "Early symptoms [of CTE] include memory problems and confusion, depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, headaches, and behavior changes."

Josh's prognosis looked bleak. His father worried, *Is he going to start to degenerate right away? Is he going to be able to finish high school? To hold down a job? To have a relationship?*

Angie Plesce, who works as a substitute teacher, already had experience caring for children with special needs and knew how demanding that could be. *I do it on an eight-hour basis and I struggle*, she thought. *I can't imagine having to do this all the time for the rest of my son's life.*

JOSH PLESCE does not have CTE. "There is no test or biomarker or anything out there that would allow us to reach that diagnosis without postmortem analysis," says Micky Collins, director of the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center Sports Medicine Concussion Program, to whom Angie and George turned for a second opinion. Josh simply had a poorly treated concussion, which cleared up after four months of treatment at UPMC, where doctors slowly reduced the medications he had been taking and gave him exercises to work out his vestibular and ocular systems. He had to relearn how to coordinate his head and eye movements, and used a computer program to reteach his eyes how to track together. He got back to school and started working out again. When an activity became too easy, the doctors made it harder. Josh still suffers from occasional migraines, but he's back playing soccer and has mostly caught up academically.

Even cutting-edge science cannot yet definitively diagnose Alzheimer's disease in living patients, let alone the far less common CTE. The only way to do that is at autopsy, when the brain can be examined under a microscope. And CTE takes years to develop. At age 16, Josh was almost certainly too young to have the disease.

"We don't have a true handle," says Julian Bailes, chairman of the department of neurosurgery and codirector of the NorthShore Neurological Institute near Chicago. "We don't have the knowledge of how prevalent [CTE] is, of what the incidence is in former players. We just don't know because everybody is sort of self-selected." Because the majority of the brains studied so far have come from players who were exhibiting

symptoms of a degenerative brain disease, the fact that almost all have such an illness is unsurprising. “But,” Bailes says, “the findings are real.”

According to figures released in September, Boston University’s CTE Center has found CTE in 87 of the 91 brains of deceased NFL players it has studied—95.6%. That came two years after McKee said, “I’m really wondering if, on some level, every single football player doesn’t have [CTE].”

The problem with McKee’s approach is that her group looks for degenerative brain disease in football players who clearly had degenerative brain disease. “There’s certainly a bias,” McKee concedes. “We take a brain based only on exposure. If the family contacts us, our criteria for admission into the brain bank are: Were they exposed to [brain injury]? How long did they play? At what level did they play? But families who are concerned about their loved ones are much more likely to go to the trouble of donation because they want an answer.”

To understand with any certainty what the effect of football might be on the brain, researchers need to study both the brains of former players who had no symptoms of dementia and the brains of people with symptoms of dementia who never stepped on a football field.

WE KNOW that some football players have developed a disease that appears different from other degenerative brain conditions, but we don’t know why or how. How many blows to the head increase the risk of CTE? Why do some athletes develop this disease and others don’t? Does genetics make some people more susceptible to injury than others? Most important, how can we identify and track the disease in living patients? Without being able to monitor the development of CTE, how will we be able to evaluate the effectiveness of potential therapies?

Last March, 49ers star linebacker Chris Borland quit football after his rookie season, citing fears of the long-term risk of brain damage. But did he jump ship too early or too late? He might have hit a genetic jackpot and not be susceptible to CTE at all. Or the accumulation of hits from youth, college and his single year of pro football might already be causing rogue tau protein to clump inside his brain.

Several NFL veterans have come forward saying that they have been clinically diagnosed with CTE based on symptoms of dementia, including Brent Boyd, a guard with the Vikings, who claims to be the first person alive to have been diagnosed with the disease, and former Vikings linebacker Fred McNeill. McNeill was originally diagnosed with dementia in 2009, then CTE by Omalu in 2010, and finally with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), a degenerative disease of the motor neurons, in 2014. Last month he died from complications of ALS.

A study by Peter Nelson, a professor of pathology at the University of Kentucky, published in the *Journal of Neuropathology & Experimental Neurology* in May 2010, found that about 18% of patients with a postmortem diagnosis of dementia did not fit within the National Institute on Aging and Reagan Institute recommendations for the diagnosis of Alzheimer’s disease. ALS, Parkinson’s disease and Alzheimer’s disease are “all characterized by very slow, progressive, steady dysfunction of various parts of the brain,” says Robert Pascuzzi, director of the ALS clinic at Indiana University. “The

vast majority of ALS patients have normal thinking, they don’t have any dementia of any type, but there’s a subgroup, I’ll just say 5%, that do have dementia.” The NIH held its first consensus conference to attempt to agree on a clinical definition for the diagnosis of CTE last February. Omalu, though, strongly believes McNeill had chronic traumatic myeloencephalopathy, meaning that tau tangles were building up in both his brain and spinal cord. “[McNeill’s] brain damage manifested with both cognitive and motor symptoms resembling dementia and ALS,” says Omalu. The true test of that hypothesis will come in the next couple of weeks. After McNeill died on Nov. 3, his family gave his brain to Omalu for analysis, and according to Omalu the results will be ready soon.

There are signs of progress in understanding CTE. Bailes and Omalu have had success in detecting tau deposits in retired football players by injecting a chemical marker that binds to the neurofibril-

RACKED BRAINS

McKee (right), who got a grant from Goodell (far right) and the NFL, has found CTE in dead players, but for more meaningful results she must study brain tissue from a greater variety of people.



HOW MANY BLOWS TO THE HEAD INCREASE THE RISK OF CTE?

DISEASE AND OTHERS DON'T? DOES GENETICS MAKE SOME

lary tangles and by using PET scans to depict the distribution of the marker. McNeill was one of the former players who took part in that research, and results showed evidence of tau protein buildup. If Omalu now finds definitive proof in McNeill’s brain, then PET scans may be a way to diagnose CTE in living patients.

Kun Ping Lu, a professor at Harvard Medical School, and his team have developed an antibody that binds to a form of tau that is suspected of forming tangles and triggering both CTE and Alzheimer’s. This antibody could be used to look for early signs of the disease through a blood test, or as an

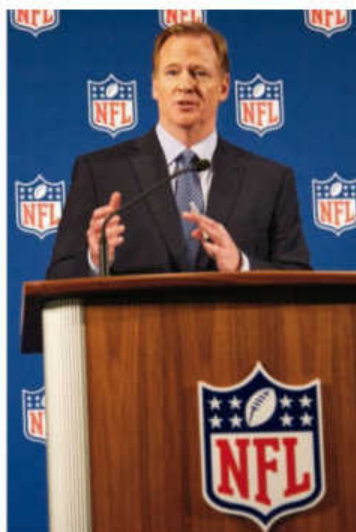
intervention to halt CTE's progress. But the results of these studies might take decades to reach patients, in part because of the long gestation period of the illness, and also because proof still requires an autopsy.

This isn't to say that football can't be made safer. The major sports all have policies, developed in the last few years, to assess concussions (*right*). According to Bailes, there is consensus among experts that CTE is a result of repetitive head trauma, with or without diagnosis of concussion, and there is agreement that reducing exposure to and improving treatment of head impacts will be beneficial.

The key to reducing exposure to head impacts may lie in improving detection of damage. "We desperately need a way of measuring the amount of minor brain trauma that occurs on the field," McKee says, "even in the absence of concussions." That would allow researchers to evaluate ideas

intended to decrease exposure, and also help prevent players from sustaining successive sub-concussive blows without time for healing and recovery in between. A whole industry touting helmet- or head-mounted accelerometers has sprung up, and Gary Strangman, associate professor of psychology at Harvard Medical School, is working to develop a near-infrared system that could be worn and would give live feedback of how the brain is moving within the skull.

Keep in mind that it is certainly more dangerous for humans to avoid all physical risks—i.e., not engage in athletic activity—than



WHY DO SOME ATHLETES DEVELOP THIS PEOPLE MORE SUSCEPTIBLE TO INJURY THAN OTHERS?

to play football or soccer or any other sport in which the head could suffer a blow. "America's problem is not that it plays football," says Uzma Samadani, an associate professor of neurosurgery at the University of Minnesota and a neurotrauma consultant to the NFL, "but that it watches football." According to the NIH, the age-adjusted leading cause of death in the U.S. in 2010 was coronary heart disease, which is strongly linked to obesity. A 2012 paper in *Neurology* concluded that the mortality from cardiovascular disease in a cohort of 3,439 NFL players was 32% less than that in their peers in the general population. The consequences of obesity remain significantly worse than the consequences of playing sports, including collision sports.

As much as Webster's and Seau's stories may illustrate the dangers of underestimating the consequences of head impacts, Josh Plesce's story highlights the danger of overestimating them. □

ERICK W. RASCO FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

ON THE LOOKOUT

CONCERNED ABOUT CONCUSSION RATES,
LEAGUES HAVE ADOPTED THE FOLLOWING
PROTOCOLS TO DETECT BRAIN INJURIES

NFL | League-employed spotters sit in a sky box monitoring the action. When they suspect a concussion, they are now authorized to call a medical timeout, stopping the game so medical personnel can attend to a player. The spotters relay any concerns to the team physician, an unaffiliated "neurotrauma consultant" and a trainer, who then evaluate the player. There have been three medical timeouts so far this season.

NHL | It too uses spotters. Before this season each club had its own trained concussion spotter. Now teams can use a spotter supplied by the league, who takes mandated online seminars and studies written materials but cannot stop games.

MLB | When a concussion is suspected, the athletic trainer is the first responder. The home-team physician then

takes over further evaluation.

NCAA FOOTBALL

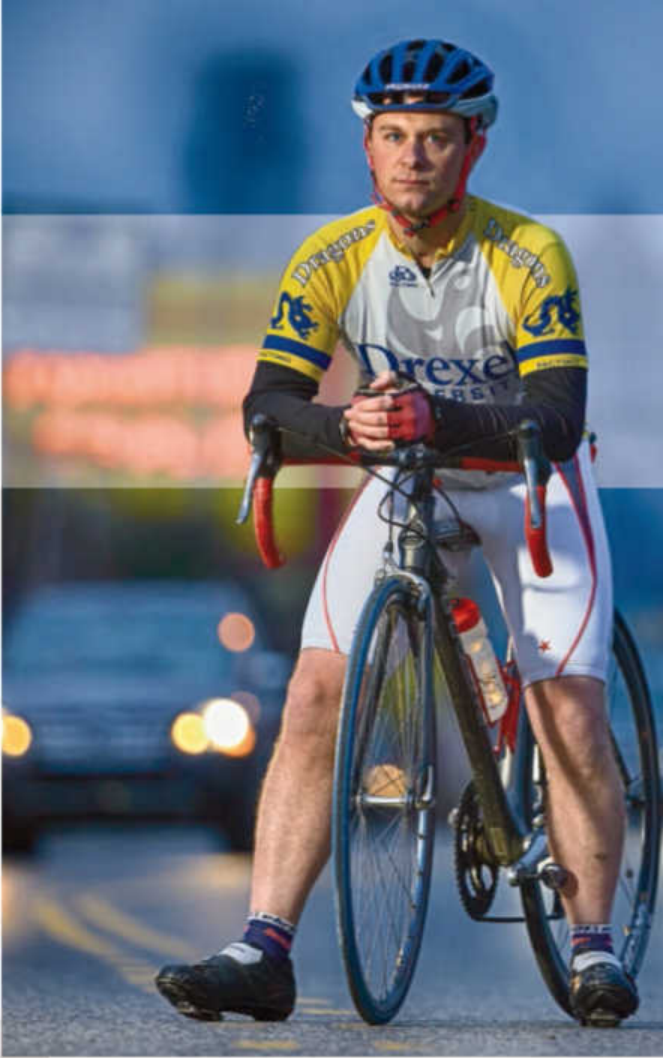
The NCAA's process is similar to the NFL's: Spotters stationed in the replay booth can stop a game when they suspect a concussion and relay information to trainers and physicians.

NBA | If a potential concussion occurs, the player is removed from the game by trainers to undergo evaluation by team doctors.

NASCAR | When a driver is involved in a crash and his car can no longer roll, he must be taken to the infield, where doctors evaluate him. If his car is not immobilized, the infield doctors can decide whether to evaluate him.

MLS | After a concussion is believed to have occurred, the player is removed from the game and evaluated by his team's medical staff, led by the club's neuropsychologist.

—Jeremy Fuchs



WHEELS IN MOTION

AFTER DOUG MARKGRAF WAS HIT BY A TRUCK
WHILE RIDING HIS BIKE, HE WASN'T
EXPECTED TO LIVE, LET ALONE RECOVER.
BUT HE DID, AND NOW HIS TYPE OF
TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY IS BEING
STUDIED, THANKS TO NFL MONEY

BY MATT MCCARTHY

IN THE EARLY EVENING of May 31, 2006, Doug Markgraf, a sophomore materials engineering major at Drexel, put on his training gear and helmet and hopped on his bicycle for a ride across West Philadelphia to meet a landlord. The apartment for rent turned out to be just what Markgraf had hoped for—cheap and spacious—so after speaking with the owner, he got back on his bike to report the good news to his roommate, Andy Evenson.

Approaching the intersection of 55th Street and Lancaster Avenue, Markgraf was wondering where in the new place he and Evenson would store the equipment for their engineering project: a chain-mail shirt like the ones medieval knights wore into battle. But Markgraf never finished that thought. At the busy intersection a white Dodge Quad Cab struck him and sped off. Markgraf, thrown several feet, lay unconscious on the side of the road.

Moments later emergency responders transported him three miles to the emergency room at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania (HUP); he was then moved to the hospital's Neurologic Intensive Care Unit. The impact of his head hitting the ground had caused bleeding in Markgraf's brain, and an MRI revealed hemorrhages in both cerebral hemispheres and, most damaging, in the brain stem—the part of the brain responsible for consciousness. He had suffered a severe traumatic brain injury, and doctors felt his chance for meaningful recovery was negligible.

Doug's mother, Jen, was taking a bath at home in Abington, Pa., that evening when she heard the cellphone of her husband, Daniel, ring. When the Markgrafs reached the hospital an hour later, they were rushed into a room with two chaplains and a senior physician. "It was so surreal," Jen says. "He's telling us that Doug is totally unresponsive. I'm hearing

the words, but they're just not registering." Within hours the hospital hallways were lined with Doug's friends and relatives. "It was like a nonstop vigil," Jen says. "We were never alone."

About five days after the accident Jen started to lose hope. "A few doctors [were] saying there's no brain activity, and I thought, Oh, my God, my son isn't going to make it."

Nine days later, Doug Markgraf woke up.

ON SEPT. 5, 2012, Roger Goodell said that the NFL was donating \$30 million to the National Institutes of Health to support research on injuries, with a focus on brain trauma. Fifteen months later the NIH announced the recipients of the NFL grants: two groups that had each pooled resources from different hospitals and university departments. The first group—led by Ann McKee, a professor of neurology and pathology at Boston University, and including imaging teams from Washington University (St. Louis) and Massachusetts General Hospital—was awarded \$6 million to define a set of criteria for the stages of chronic traumatic encephalopathy. BU's work on CTE has been covered extensively in the media (SI, Nov. 1, 2010), and it was no surprise that

McKee's group was a primary grant recipient. But the other team favored by the NIH, led by Wayne Gordon, a rehabilitation medicine professor at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City, was unexpected. Many neurologists had never heard of Gordon or his work. And the NIH was handing him \$6 million of NFL money to fund research that seemed largely unrelated to football or to concussions.

Gordon had teamed up with scientists at Mass General, Oregon Health Sciences University and the University of Washington to create a proposal to evaluate brain tissue from hundreds of patients living with moderate to severe traumatic brain injury (TBI), of which concussion is a mild form. Unlike CTE, whose symptoms develop over years, TBI occurs immediately, after a distinct dramatic event such as an automobile accident, an explosion or, in football, a high-speed collision. Partly because of car crashes, TBI is the leading cause of death in North America for people ages one to 45. But it's shockingly misunderstood.

"Our means of classification of traumatic brain injury is terrible," says Gordon, 69. "We currently divide folks into three groups: mild, moderate and severe traumatic brain injury. But a mild injury can act like a severe injury and vice versa, and we don't know why." TBI appears to reduce life expectancy by seven years for those who survive the injury, but that too, says Gordon, is "something we don't yet understand."

Gordon and his team are studying the general population to discover ways to better classify patients who have suffered a TBI. But to accomplish that—to understand how the brain changes after a dramatic injury—Gordon needs access to damaged brains that have recovered.

After Markgraf was broadsided by the truck, the force of his head's collision with the ground caused widespread tearing of the neurons and blood vessels in his brain, resulting in a form of TBI called diffuse axonal injury. For him to regain consciousness after two weeks was very unlikely. The first person to notice a hopeful sign was Brian Edlow, a 26-year-old medical student from New York City who was examining Markgraf on his daily rounds. "I'll never forget when Doug first squeezed my hand," Edlow says. "It was one of the most thrilling experiences I can remember."

Over the next few weeks Markgraf slowly regained consciousness but was confused and found it hard to stay awake. "I wanted to go back to sleep at every moment," he says, "because I thought I was in a dream."

Markgraf suffered a host of complicated medical problems, including depression and post-traumatic amnesia. "Brain injury is really frightening," he says. "You wake up and gain awareness, only to realize you can't trust yourself the way you used to. Nothing works the same way." But with aggressive physical therapy and rehabilitation, things slowly began to make sense to him. "It wasn't until doctors prescribed serious antidepressants that I realized that this horrible thing really happened," he says.

Markgraf also had a vestibular disturbance, which disrupted his sense of balance. If he reached for something, he missed his target. If he stood up, he fell over. A frontal-lobe injury caused other impairments: "I had the physical ability to move my legs, but I couldn't control them," he says. "I could move my arms, but they wouldn't go where I wanted. I couldn't make a complete sentence, but in my brain I thought I was fine."

After several weeks at HUP, Markgraf was transferred to MossRehab in Elkins Park, Pa., one of the premier facilities for patients recovering from

TBI. As he recuperated, he became fixated on one thing: getting back on his bike. "Cycling was my avenue to do everything," he says. "It's the reason I studied material engineering—I wanted to put better materials in a bike—and it became the driving force behind my rehab."

When Markgraf arrived at MossRehab, he was in a wheelchair and told he'd be lucky to walk again. "I've never done well with someone telling me I can't do something," he says. During weeks of inpatient rehab and about a year as an outpatient, he regained enough strength and coordination to ride a bike again. On June 27, 2011, about a month after the fifth anniversary of his accident, he began a cross-country ride.

Markgraf cycled 3,200 miles from San Francisco to Toms River, N.J., making stops to speak to patients recovering from TBI. It took him two months. "I did it to show everyone what was possible," he says. He also started Project Mend the Mind to increase awareness of TBI and inspire victims

of it. He is one of only a few people in the history of medical literature to have achieved such functional independence after so severe an injury.

ONE YEAR after Markgraf's accident, Brian Edlow graduated at the top of his class at the University of Pennsylvania Medical School. He did his residency in neurology and a fellowship in neurocritical care at Mass General and Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital. He is now a rising star in the burgeoning field of coma and consciousness neuroimaging. He runs a laboratory that develops techniques to predict outcomes in comatose patients. He is also a member of Wayne Gordon's research collaborative.

Armed with a \$5 million MRI machine called a Connectome scanner—the most powerful imaging tool in the world—Edlow began scanning patients at Harvard's Martinos Center for Biomedical Imaging around the time of Goodell's press release in 2012. The scanner produces images in three dimensions with unprecedented detail and clarity. Edlow's first

HANDS ON

Edlow (below), the neurologist who noted the first sign of Markgraf's recovery, is now a leading researcher into traumatic brain injury.



BINGE-READING.
IT'S ABOUT TO BE A THING.

SPECIAL REPORT

patients were healthy volunteers, who would serve as a control group. When he needed to look at a previously damaged brain, one that had recovered from a devastating injury, he knew whom to call.

Six years and seven months after his bike accident, Markgraf underwent a scan at Harvard. By mapping the connectivity of Markgraf's brain, Edlow and his team saw disruptions within neural networks that likely caused his coma, as well as the intact connections that might have enabled him to recover. These networks were previously undetectable by MRI scanners. Markgraf was, essentially, Patient Zero, and his brain provided crucial information for Gordon's grant proposal to the NFL.

"There are few tools that help physicians predict which patients in traumatic coma will make a recovery like Markgraf's," says Edlow, "and which will be like his neighbor in the neurocritical care unit. That patient had the same type of brain injury but died one month later, never having regained consciousness. And we don't really know why."

Gordon, Edlow and their collaborators are using the NFL's grant to analyze hundreds of living patients who have a history of mild, moderate or severe TBI. Participants undergo a neurobehavioral assessment as well as a genomic analysis. When they die, their brains will be shipped to Edlow and his colleagues at the Martinos Center for the same type of high-resolution MRI performed on Markgraf. Each brain will then undergo a detailed microscopic evaluation by pathologists.

The combination of state-of-the-art imaging and microscopic analysis is expected to yield insights into how TBI causes long-term problems with memory, attention, emotional regulation and other functions. Researchers hope the study will lead to the identification of a biomarker (or markers) that will allow for the diagnosis of traumatic brain disease or CTE while people are still alive, providing a foundation for better treatment.

WHAT TIES the two largest grant proposals together is a quest to understand how the brain responds to injury, whether from a series of concussive or subconcussive blows or from a single massive event. What has become clear from the initial work is that there is a wide variability in response to head trauma, from concussion to coma. "A concussion is a response of the brain to head trauma," says Daniel Perl, head of the Center for Neuroscience and Regenerative Medicine's Brain Repository at Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, Md., and one of Gordon's collaborators. "It doesn't define the head trauma; it's a response."

This is a subtle and crucial point, and it has significant implications for the NFL's concussion protocol. If a concussion doesn't properly quantify the severity of a blow to the brain, then the NFL, using its current protocol, might be allowing players to remain on the field who shouldn't—players who have a higher threshold before they exhibit concussion symptoms. Absence of concussion does not equal absence of injury. There were 123 documented concussions and head injuries in the NFL in 2014, but that number might represent only a fraction of significant head injuries.

The league is also funding six small pilot programs designed to improve the diagnosis of concussions and to identify potential biomarkers that could be used to track recovery—something that will benefit athletes of all ages. Given the NFL's previous resistance to acknowledging the widespread incidence of brain injuries in football, there's reason to consider its philanthropy a cynical public relations move. Regardless, the money is supporting the kind of research that might someday explain why Doug Markgraf woke up from a coma and the patient in the hospital bed next to him did not. □

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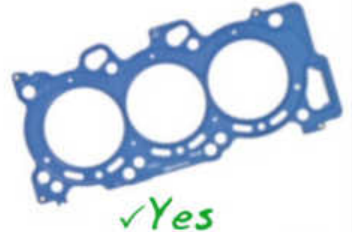
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The Barry Problem

→ BY MICHAEL ROSENBERG

AFTER BEING KEPT out of the baseball Hall of Fame and investigated by the government, Barry Bonds suffered another blow last week when he found himself working for the Marlins. He will be their hitting coach, at least for a little while. Miami, baseball's most dysfunctional franchise, changes managers as often as pitchers, so anybody working there should think twice before signing up for a full-season parking pass.

The 51-year-old Bonds, like the sport he loves, finds himself in a strange spot. If he does his job well, he can help slugger Giancarlo Stanton become almost as good as Bonds was, which would help Stanton sail into Cooperstown while Bonds, the all-time home run leader, is still left out.

Maybe you can understand why so many baseball writers won't give him their Hall votes. They are penalizing him for his alleged dalliance with performance-enhancing drugs. This is what Bonds gets for going to BALCO instead of CVS. But it does make you wonder: If Bonds is allowed to teach major leaguers how to hit, why can't he be honored for how well he did it himself?

Bonds is not like Sammy Sosa or Mark McGwire, who presumably wrote their Hall of Fame résumés on the backs of their dealers. Long before the time when anybody thinks he juiced, Bonds was the best player of his generation, a 30-30 outfielder with multiple MVPs before he turned 30. His performance did not need enhancing—and when he started enhancing it, baseball had a “nothing to see here” approach to PEDs. And yet: Many players believed steroid use was cheating, even without rules prohibiting it. Many fans were appalled that so many stars had been using. There is a reason none of these guys issued press releases detailing their steroid use. They knew how the public would react.

It is telling that the door to Cooperstown remains closed to Bonds while the door to the Marlins' indoor batting cage is open. The Hall of Fame vote is a judgment of who is worthy. The hiring process is a search for who can help.

Bonds did not help himself for most of his career by

If Bonds is
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putting the *oof* in *aloof*. Jason Giambi was a walking, talking syringe for the best years of his career, but he is such a chipper fellow that nobody really holds it against him. Bonds was a convenient piñata, not just for the media and fans but for people who ran teams. He led the National League in on-base percentage at .480 in 2007, but he still couldn't find a job the next spring.

Eight years later the Marlins have given Bonds a chance. It's easy to wonder: What if he does so well that he gets a managing job? What if he does that so well that he builds a case as a Hall of Fame manager? Would he get in?

The problem with drawing a line in the sand is that people walk over it when you aren't looking. It is easy for voters to cross their arms now and say they won't let drug users into the Hall of Fame. But what if they already have, and we just don't know it yet? A handful of stars from Bonds's era have earned plaques, and more will follow in the next few years. They are all assumed to be clean—or, at least, there is no direct evidence that they used. But what if the evidence comes later?

At some point we will find out that a Hall of Famer used PEDs. It may be through an honest admission, a federal case, a TMZ report or a divorce filing by a bitter spouse. What happens then? Will the Hall take down the plaque?

If we find out that a user is already in the Hall, how can anybody tell Bonds he does not deserve to be there? That would be a tough one to explain, and it would seem personal. The simple solution would be to vote Bonds into the Hall of Fame. It would be a roundabout journey but a logical conclusion. For fun he should ask for his plaque to depict him in a Marlins cap. □

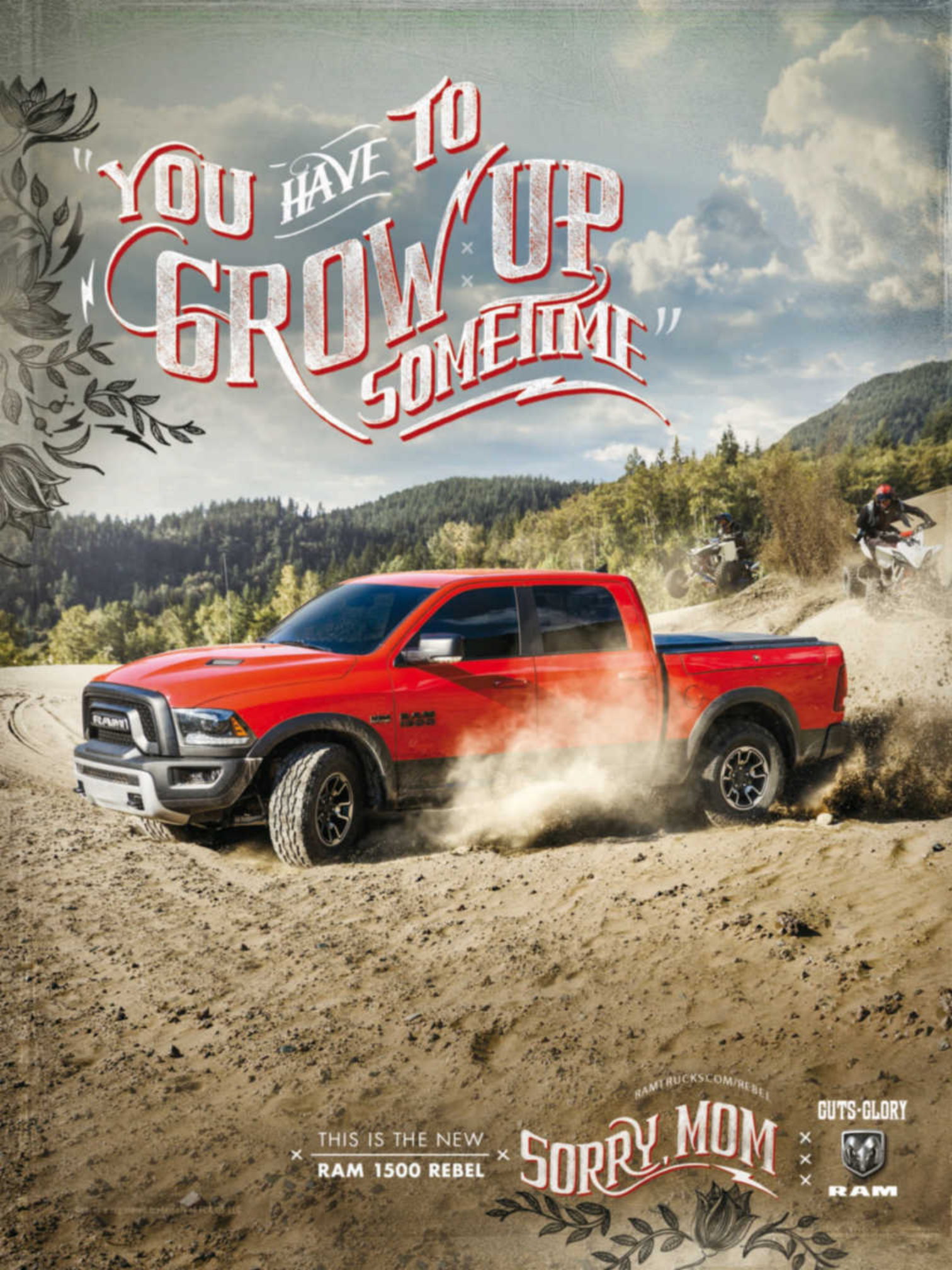


Should Barry Bonds be in the Hall of Fame?

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